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VOL.LXXXIX No. 3

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A Swashbuckling Novel—Complete

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Captain Bill Jones poured a drink. Big one. It warmed his belly. "Ho," he said, smacking a gold coin upon the bar. "Know what it is? Spanish doubloon. How much would a couple kegs chockablock be worth?" From that beginning Joblin the trader, Madame Gruen, Samson and Black Pierre sweep this humorous and salty novel on to piratical boarding affray and blood in the scuppers.

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Cover design by John Newton Howitt *Headings by I. B. Hazelton, V. E. Pyles*

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

Published twice a month by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $1.50 in advance. Single copy, 15 Cents. Foreign postage, 50c additional. Trade Mark Registered;

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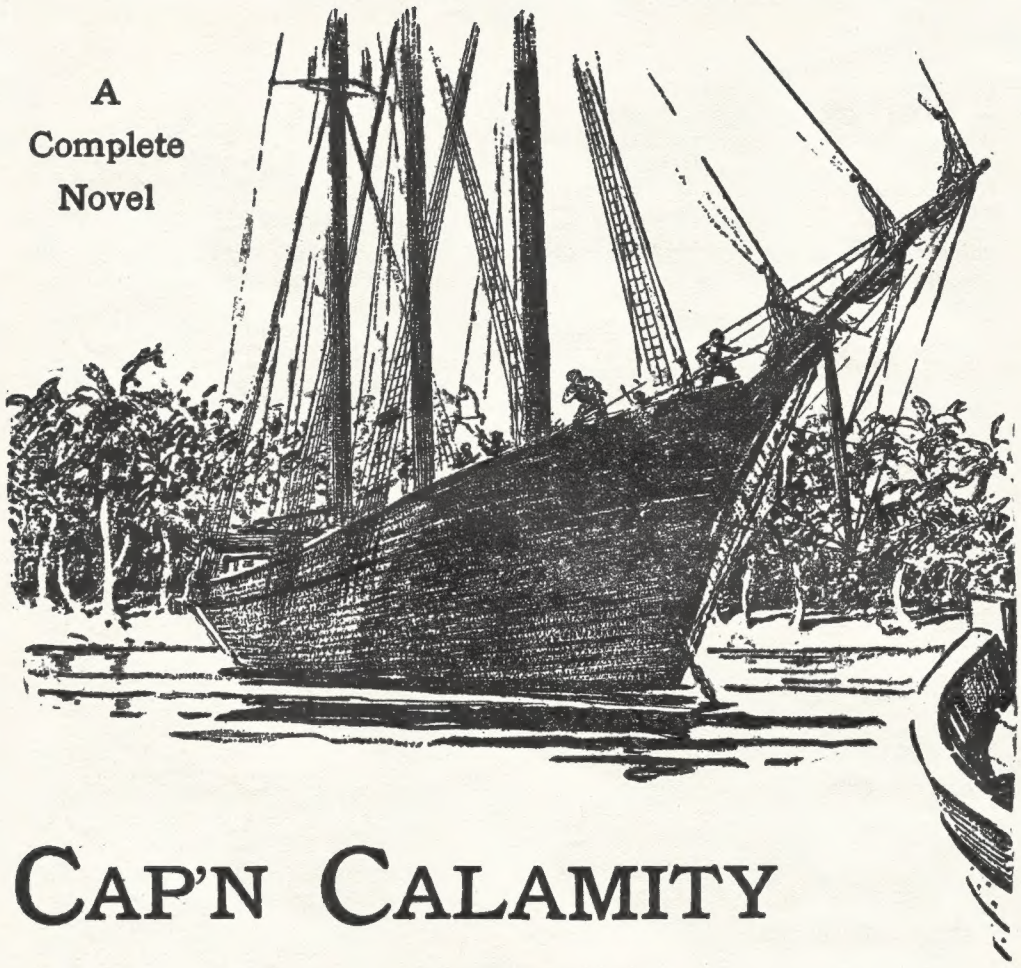
A Complete Novel



CAP'N CALAMITY

By GORDON YOUNG

CHAPTER I

"DYIN' OF A BROKE HEART"

CAPTAIN BILL JONES, trader, blackbirder, pearler, or whatever else was to seaward, scrouged about in the sand to make a softer sitting place, leaned against the door post of Trader Jim's hut, poured another drink of gin and with no liking eyed the sad looking young fellow.

"Him there, he's dyin' of a broke heart," said Trader Jim, waggling his own bottle of gin, pointing. Trader Jim was fat. His face was bearded like a porcupine's back.

Captain Bill grunted, doubtful.

"Him there," Jim added, shifting the bottle toward Bill, "he can put you in the way of gettin' home."

The young man groaned, "God, if I ever get back I'll never be a fool again!" He dropped his head between his hands and rubbed his hair as if washing it, shivered as if the water he used were icy.

"Me, now me," said Trader Jim woozily, "I got a tender heart toward them as has no luck with women." Jim was so fat he waddled. His words seemed to bubble hoarsely from vast depths. "Take Mary out there—"

He shifted his bulky arm, pointed with the bottom of the gin bottle through the doorway to where a wrinkled frizzle-headed, dangle-breasted woman in dirty

pink calico sat among naked cannibals and smoked a short-stemmed clay pipe. Now and then some cannibal female would take the pipe from Mary's mouth, puff a time or two, give it back.

"She, *she*," said Trader Jim with great waggle of head and looking as if about to cry a little, "is a proper woman!"

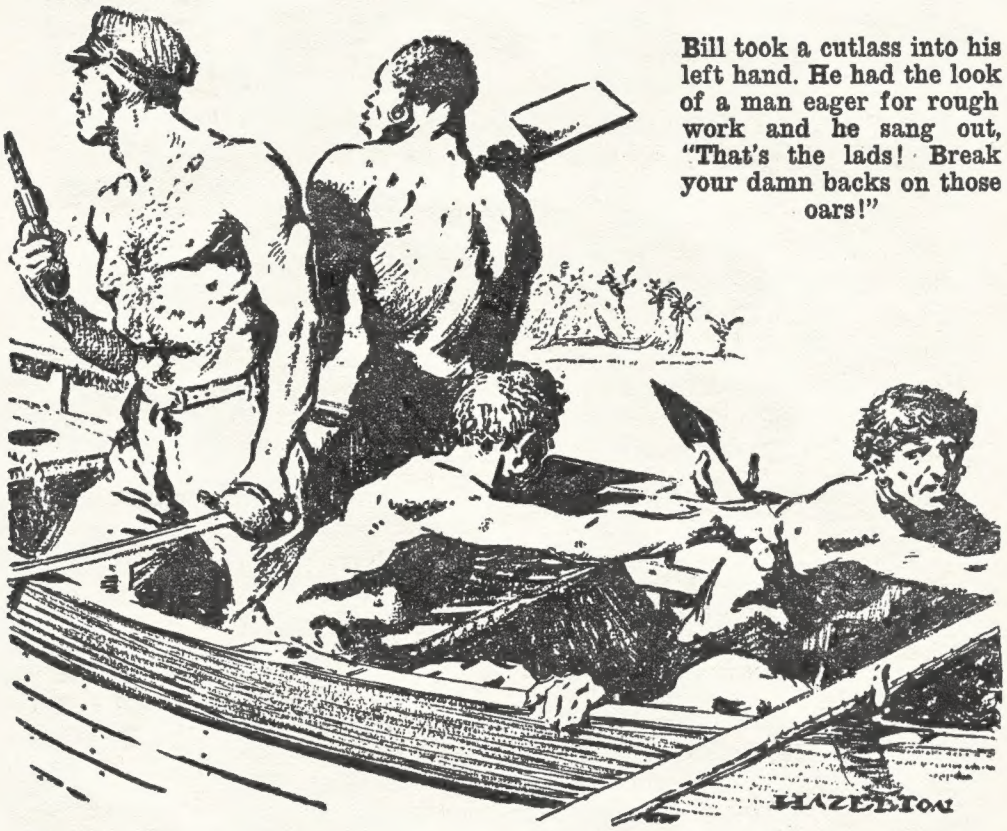
Bill grinned.

"Tell 'im, Bill. Tell 'im." A couple of tears, or maybe sweat drops, started down each side of Trader Jim's nose.

"She's Fijian," said Bill. "Jim here a dozen years ago took her with him to Duperrey over in the Carolines. Treacherer than hell, them fellows them days. One o' the chiefs wanted Mary. Twelve years ago, mind. She didn't look like now. Jim here he had to cut an' run. Just did get off to a whaler. That night Mary got away and swum out, three mile. Risk sharks and reefs in a boiling tide.

"She's a good sort, all right. Jim here can get drunk any place an' go to sleep. Mary'll set there, awake an' watchin'."

"Yes'r," said Jim. "Pr-roper woman, her. Some day," he announced, raising the bottle as if taking an oath, "I'm goin' marry 'er!"



Bill took a cutlass into his left hand. He had the look of a man eager for rough work and he sang out, "That's the lads! Break your damn backs on those oars!"

Captain Bill eyed the drunken trader with enigmatic stare. He was younger than Jim but had been in the South Seas as long. To Captain Bill, land was just a place where people raised vegetables for seamen to eat. He was brawny, deep-chested, with massive muscular body, tousled red hair and bony face; had clear blue eyes that, if unangered, were usually a-twinkle with good nature. But

many minor magistrates throughout the islands found him troublesome.

Down in Sydney they had once arrested Captain Bill and had a riot. He pitched policemen about as a bull does dogs, tore up tables to get their legs, broke the legs over men's heads. He flung chairs, heaved bottles, overturned the bar, and threw a hot stove through the side of the pub. The magistrate was indignant. Bill was heavily fined and slammed into jail. He had no money, no friends that he knew of with money—at least none with tolerance enough to pay the cost of such a wild night. There was talk along the waterfront about it being a shame to bear down so hard on Captain Bill, "him who stood by the *McCullough* that time"; but the magistrate was a landsman, looked still a little seasick from the voyage out to the colonies. These landsmen were about to libel Bill's little old dirty schooner for the damages when somebody anonymously through a lawyer settled the damages, paid the fine, and Bill, with never an inkling as to who had helped him, was returned to his schooner and so to sea.

But the lesson, if it were a lesson, was unlearned. Soon after, up in Samoa—those were the days of the 1880's when Dutchmen, as Bill called Germans, ran things—he wrecked a Chinaman's store much as if a hurricane had picked on it, scattered numerous chinks, all the police, and a couple of public spirited citizens, made incautious by too much warm beer. Then he drank a bottle of brandy, curled up on the grass in the moonlight and slept. So he was captured, fined, sentenced to road work.

The morning of the first day out Bill took the gun from the guard, sat in the shade and directed the guard to sledge big rocks into smaller rocks. Bill was critical about the size of the little rocks. When the entertainment grew boresome, he strolled back to town with the gun under his arm, had a drink or two, and went unmolested to his ship and off to sea. There was much guttural spluttering over the outrage.

Yet proper seamen, on quarterdeck or forecastle, were tolerant about Bill's lawless frolics. There was, for instance, the wreck of the coastal steamer, *McCullough,* in a storm off the Barrier Reef. Captain Bill's dirty little schooner, under a smother of waves and wind, stood by with great daring and splendid seamanship to take off passengers and crew.

Even then Bill got into trouble. Among the first boat load of women and children that came off was the owner of the steamer, a blustering fat-rumped fellow. He hadn't pulled an oar. He had just squatted among the whimpering children and wet, shivering women. When he got on deck and began "my man-ing" Bill, saying who he was and what all he would do to reward Bill, the brawny Yankee looked him up and down. "Any more women on that wreck?" said Bill.

"Why yes, eight or ten."

In the midst of such hurry and stress, Captain Bill didn't have time to go into details of a proper cussing. He drove his fist into the rich man's face, cracking his jaw.

That day Bill saved sixty-two lives and the ship's cat. Within an hour or two after the captain came off with the cat in his arms, the *McCullough* shifted from its coral perch and was submerged.

In spite of the gallant rescue there was a big hullaballoo over Captain Bill's brutality. He had knocked down two or three other passengers in pants who wanted to be wrapped in blankets and fed hot tea instead of doing whatever it was Bill told them to do. So the rich man, misguided by his own sore jaw, insisted upon an official investigation into Bill's conduct.

Captain Bill, feeling uncomfortable and looking a bit odd in store clothes—his red hair was as tousled as ever and the shoes hurt his feet—was haled before some sort of tribunal presided over

by a lean fastidious old aristocrat whom everybody treated with a kind of hushed respect. He was an old naval sea captain, that aristocrat, now Her Majesty's High Commissioner in the South Seas. He gazed long and piercingly at Captain Bill, noiselessly fingered a sheaf of thin pages, asked a question.

Bill jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the swathed face of the rich man:

"Sure I hit 'im. He took a woman's place—two or three of 'em with that fat belly!—in the boat. I ought 've killed him!"

Captain Bill, in a kind of blurred haze as to what it was all about, merely knew that some not so very pretty women who had been on the steamer and were now present threw their arms about his neck when somebody or other said, "Case dismissed."

So Bill returned to his schooner and went banging about the islands, seldom in funds, always in debt, always being cheated by merchants and planters, but respected by seamen. He cheerfully drove through storms where other masters were hove-to and, according to their upbringing, prayed or cussed.

CHAPTER II

The Gold Doubloon

"YEZUR," sobbed Trader Jim with thickening tongue, waggling his bottle at the disconsolate young man on the biscuit box, "his young lady played 'im false."

"She marry a Chinaman?" asked Captain Bill, sympathetic. "My best girls somehow allus marry Chinamen."

"'Zuh climate makes 'em," said Trader Jim.

"Then I wreck their store."

Trader Jim fumbled among the bottles in the case of gin by his side, fished up a new squareface, held it out. "Have 'nother drink, Bill."

Bill put down his cup, held the bottle with his left hand, struck the neck with flat edge of palm. The glass snapped off. Bill shook the bottle, washing off particles of glass, then poured into the cup.

"Wallowaggo Burns brought 'im to me," said Trader Jim, gazing with bleareyed fondness at his unhappy guest. "Wallowaggo said as how he's paid to get to the lonesomest place in the South Seas."

Bill nodded. "You got the pick of what the devil had left over." He knew that almost any other trader tucked away on the remote and savage island of Quica, with a batch of dinky trade, would have starved or gone mad. Jim stayed mildly pickled and grew fat.

"But he don't like the women here," Jim lamented.

Captain Bill lifted his shaggy eyebrows. "No?" He turned his head and stretched his neck to peer above the two-foot threshold of the hut, built up to keep out wandering pigs, and gazed at the frizzle-headed monkey-faced cannibals clustered about Mary under a breadfruit who, from a distance, watched white men at the sacred ritual of bottle tipping.

"An' he don't drink enough," Trader Jim complained paternally. "I ust to be puny. No appytite. But now—" He expanded, held his arms, wide, showed his bulk. He patted the squareface. "Fat'nin'."

Captain Bill had a long look at the young fellow. His girl had married another man. He had written her a fool letter about going off into the far places to seek forgetfulness, perhaps death; and had hardly got a tan on his face before he was bellyaching tearfully to get home.

"Any man marries your girl," said Bill, giving the best advice he knew, "poke 'im on the nose—and get another'n! Like Jim here would do me if I was to steal his Mary."

"Nosh shoo," said Jim, drowsily. He made other sounds that being interpreted meant. "You're a good fellow, Bill. Any-

body-else, poke 'em on the nose. But not you." The words trailed off into mild snoring.

Captain Bill arose, stretched his arms. "Come along if you're going with me. Tide-turn." He gazed at Trader Jim, who lay back in the peaceful exhaustion of drunkenness. "Traders can't drink," said Bill. He heaved up the case of gin, carried it back in the store room, locked the door.

Captain Bill took the young fellow's heavy dunnage bag, stepped out, swung it on to his shoulder and strode over to Jim's wife among the natives. He gave her the key and told her to go in and keep the flies off her lord and master, who was resting.

On their way through the ankle-deep white sand the young fellow suddenly drew something from his pocket and with a petulant fling tossed it away. It skittered a little on the sand and lay exposed.

Bill glanced toward it, walked to it, stopped. He picked up the dark yellowish and rather heavy disk, turned it over. "Looks like money."

"That," said the young man with angered half sneer, "was a lucky piece! Damn such luck! She gave it to me."

"Good to spend?" Bill inquired, interested.

"Oh, I suppose some people might want it. It's a Spanish doubloon. The sort of thing people look for when they look for pirate treasure." He turned his pale sickly eyes on Captain Bill, looked him over, and went on, half a-sneer: "In the old days fellows that must have looked a good deal like you sailed thousands of miles, waded through swamps, fought their way over ramparts, stormed and sacked towns, just to get that—and others like it. Today men fit out ships, spend fortunes, and go to remote, barren places, digging and fighting among themselves to find chests full of things like that. And never do!"

"Hm," said Bill, and cocked his head, rubbed the coin between thumb and finger. "Money's money, maybe." He thrust the coin into his canvas trousers and strode on.

From the schooner his boys could see Bill. They tumbled into the boat and came rowing with rhythmic heave of shoulders and swing of oars. They were shaggy headed ugly fellows, and grinned at Bill like dogs waiting for a stick to be thrown.

He was roughhanded as a devil with the cramps when displeased, but never knocked his blacks about. They had been through too many of what Bill called "shindies" together.

For mate, Bill carried a Tongan half-breed who was as battered as an old pit bull. Harry had been knifed in the face and the scar wrinkled his right eye into the look of a wild glare that frightened people. For cook, the *Marigold* had a Louisiana negro, a powerful sleek-skinned fellow, black as a whale's gizzard, wide of face with grinning teeth. Peter called himself steward, but was cook, cabin boy, roustabout, supercargo, Captain Bill's business adviser. He cleaned and oiled the guns, sharpened and greased the cutlasses, had charge of the trade stock when there was any, and bore a hand at working ship.

Peter in his youth had been a gentleman's boy at New Orleans. He gave one glance at the whiny looking young passenger and curled his lips.

Some ten days later Captain Bill transferred his still seasick passenger to a company trader, Sydney-bound, and never saw him again, never heard of him again.

CHAPTER III

Two Kegs of Treasure

THE *Marigold* came into the harbor of Tapillo at dawn.

Captain Bill gave a casual look at the shipping but eyed the town with its one-side street facing

the beach through a grove of cocoanuts. His gaze lingered a bit on the big cool square-built clubhouse, painted green and white, where gentlemen got drunk. There were stores and, out of sight, Madame Gruen's hotel. He knew each merchant by his first name; had called most of them more familiar names than that.

Peter, glistening nakedly with trousers rolled down at the waist-band and legs rolled up above the knees, stood by.

"This," said Captain Bill, "is the only near port where I'm known and don't owe anybody. But when I settled up last, I poked Joblin on the nose. I'm thinking that may have hurt my credit."

Peter grinned till his ears wiggled. "Yuh allus make out somehow."

"But not a dollar, Pete. We haven't a dollar."

"Don' let 'um know that," said Peter. "An' there am Madame Gruen. She allus want foh to marry some handsome man!"

"Not with empty hands, Pete. Doc Kelkey is the only white man on this beach. But he's no money. An' a jealous wife! Howsomever, I'll ashore and see what luck."

Captain Bill went below and put on his best clothes. Clean but tar-splotched trousers, faded blue shirt with no buttons near the collar, straw hat a little discolored by mildew but not much, and, wanting to look prosperous, even his shoes; but, of course, no socks.

It was early morning. Natives were gabbling like a flock of cockatoos under the cocoanuts with piles of glistening fish spread out, some so newly caught they weren't yet dead. Men grinned at him with upflung hands in greeting. Old crones wrinkled their lips till toothless gums showed, and pretty girls came running. They hugged him, chattered, stuck flowers about them.

He shook them off and strode on purposefully. It was pretty early for business. He didn't know much about telling a hardluck story and asking for credit. Always before there had been a charter. He felt more and more in need of a drink.

At this hour there would be a native bartender in Joblin's place who would be pretty sure to greet him with a welcoming tot.

Captain Bill pushed through the screened doorway. No one was in sight. The bar started from the wall as if to go across the spacious room but by hasty change of plan circled back. It was dim within, always dim even when the lights were going. On the walls were some highly colored pictures of sleek slim race horses and jockeys, fresh and silken.

Bill's shoes made a clatter as he strode across the room, bumping a chair out of his way.

From a stool at a little table behind the bar, Joblin himself, owner of the hotel, of a general store, chandlery, a schooner or two, and much land, rose up.

Joblin was tall, gaunt, stooped, crafty, with lean hatchet face and folds of wrinkled skin about his small eyes. He was supposed to be the richest man on the island. 'Twas said that, at least in the early days, he had done things and had friends that were as bad as the worst. The fag end of a cigar was between his sharp discolored teeth. He held his teeth clenched as if afraid Bill might try to pull away the charred butt. His small cold fish eyes fastened on Bill:

"What you want?"

"Drink," said Bill promptly, forgetting his empty pockets, and gave Joblin a look that meant he had better serve it, not ask him to go elsewhere.

In making final settlement for stores some months back, Bill, who knew but couldn't prove he was being cheated, had slammed a fist into Joblin's face. There was something about Joblin's face that made Bill's fingers curl into fists and want to jump; so now Bill rammed them down into his pockets—and thus was reminded that they were empty.

Joblin paused for a moment, hesitating. He almost told Bill he didn't care

to serve him. But Bill had a long reach and if stirred up might shake down the shelves of bottles and break a few, throwing them. Moreover, Joblin was a business man. He set out a bottle and glass, edged back, looking glum and unsocial, plainly waiting for Bill to pay.

Captain Bill poured a drink. Big one. As much as the small glass would hold. He tossed it at his mouth, giving a backward jerk of his head. Joblin reached for the bottle. One drink to Bill was about like a sniff of roast meat to a famished man. He flapped his hand and Joblin drew back his arm.

Bill knew there wouldn't be a bigger row over not paying for one drink than not paying for three or four. He didn't want a row. He wanted more drinks, then somehow to arrange for credit, even with Joblin. Bill brought the bottle up close to his breast and let an arm rest on the bar and curve about the bottle, protectively. Then Bill put his left hand down into his pocket, and smacked the hand palm-down on the bar. He lifted his hand, called out heartily, "Just have a look at this, Joblin!"

Joblin craned his long neck, cautiously. There lay something that looked like a coin, a kind of bronze yellow. He, always interested in money, edged closer, touched it, picked it up. The coin was heavy. He turned it over, backed into better light, examined it from all sides. He shot a craftily inquiring look at Bill's grinning face.

"Where 'd you get this, Bill?" Joblin's creaky voice was keyed to interest.

"Ho," said Bill, pouring another drink. "Know what it is?"

Joblin turned it over, delicately feeling the weight. He ran a hand over his head, let the fingers linger at the back of his neck, lifted a veiled glance. He had a pretty good idea what was in it even if he didn't know what it was.

"Can't say as I do, Bill." Joblin was using his hotel voice now, being social. "Odd though. What'll you take for it? Couple o' dollars?"

"Couple o' dollars!" Bill had hoped it might pass as payment for a couple of drinks. If Joblin had merely offered two shillings, Bill would have said, "Done!" Instead he laughed. "Ho ho. You know what that is? Spanish doubloon! The real thing. That's what pirates used to lay aboard ships and plunder towns to get. Then stow in chests and hide away where—"

"Where'd you get it, Bill?" Joblin coaxed, friendly.

Captain Bill poked a thumb down inside his waistband, spread his shoulders, grinned. "In a way of speaking, I found it." Bill nodded, looking wise.

Joblin's creaky voice went away up in G: "Found it?" His hands fluttered in little pawing movements as if to lay hold on Bill.

Up to that moment, Bill had had no other notion than to enhance the value of his doubloon, maybe get a couple of bottles out of Joblin. Now suddenly he sensed bigger possibilities, and, wanting some time to think, changed the subject with:

"Say, what you doin' up so early, tending your own bar?"

"The boy is sick. I couldn't put a stranger in here. Where'd you find it, Bill? Here, have another drink?"

"Thanks," said Bill and took the drink. "Where'd I find it?" Bill grinned. "Just on an island, Joblin. Nice little island."

"Treasure, Bill?" Joblin stretched his neck, leaning close.

"And worth a hell of a lot more than I expected!"

"Where, Bill? Where'd you find it? How much? What's this worth? You come on *treasure?*"

Bill, goodnatured but firm, warmed with whisky, warmed too by seeing a smart man like Joblin laid aback by the glint of a strange coin, waggled a hand and said, "I don't owe you a thing in the world, Joblin, 'Cept for these

drinks," he added readily as an honest afterthought. "When we settled that time, I paid you. With a poke on the nose throwed in."

Joblin cackled as if at a fine joke. "He he he! That was nothin', Bill. You were excited. As for these drinks—" He brushed the indebtedness aside as too trivial. "I always liked you, Bill. Have another drink!"

"Sure. But you are the first as ever told me one of my pokes on his nose didn't amount to anything!"

Joblin screwed his wrinkled face into laughter. He took out a box of cigars, offered a choice to Bill with one hand as with the other he reached out and patted Bill's shoulder. "Was there much of it, Bill?"

"Much? If people knew—hell! They'd sure be the devil to pay."

Joblin refilled Bill's glass. He could see Bill was already nicely warmed and friendly. "Where'd you find it, Bill? What's the harm in tellin' where?"

"Maybe I didn't get it all?" Bill suggested.

"Go on, drink up, Bill. Drink up an' I'll have one with you." Joblin set out a glass for himself. "You mean there is more?" Joblin's little eyes glittered deep in their sockets. "Why didn't you get it all? What happened?"

"Oh, I don't care to say exactly what did happen. A lot of things can happen. I brought off all I could but—well, for one thing, they are cannibals on that island. I'm goin' back. So it's best not to talk too much."

"But you got some?"

"'*Some*'? Huh. I don't know what it's worth, but I bet you couldn't guess within—hm—how much you think a couple kegs chockablock ought to be worth?"

Joblin had both hands on the bar. He was breathing short and quick, spoke in a jerky whisper: "Couple o' kegs! You —you've got a couple o' kegs?"

"What handier to stow 'em in?"

It was in the cool of the morning, but sweat trickled on Joblin's forehead. He wiped at it with his palm, pushed the bottle an inch or two invitingly, and seemed to be thinking of what next to say. Just at that moment two planters who had spent the night at the hotel came in for the morning's pick-me-up. Joblin hastily put a lean finger to his lips, said, "Shh-hh-h. Don't let it get abroad, Bill. Trust me, but—you know what some people are!"

Bill waggled a finger at his mouth, took back his doubloon, nodded. "Right, Joblin. Some people—oh, bad!"

"Don't go away, Bill?"

"Oh, I'll be back."

Captain Bill stopped outside the door and blinked in a haze of vague wonderment, trying to think. It was all so blastedly unexpected. He pulled out the coin, had a long look, grinned. "I'd better go back and talk it over with my boys," he thought.

Captain Bill sat down and took off his shoes, tied the strings together, flung them over his shoulder. His grateful toes wriggled in the lush grass as he passed through the grove.

CHAPTER IV

Madame Makes Her Plans

". . . AND that there is just what happened!" said Captain Bill, thumping down the palm of a broad hand on his bare cabin table, making the doubloon bounce a little.

He grinned at the black staring face of Peter, turned to the omnious eyed half-breed, and went on:

"Joblin is a smart man. Yet he's actin' like a damn fool. If it knocks *him* on his beam's end, how's the others in this town going to act?"

"*Treasuh!*" said Peter, rolling his eyes. "Gol-golly!"

Harry touched the coin with tip of

forefinger, muttered in awed amusement, "I be damned."

"Now I very careful didn't lie—much," Bill explained. "I don't like to lie, ever, to them I can lick." He began grinding niggerhead between the heels of his palms. "I can't help what Joblin thinks, can I?" He poked the tobacco into a pipe. "If he'll only think it strong enough to let me get into him for some stores and trade, we'll take a swing around the islands. But how 'm I going to keep him from findin' out all I got is one lone doubloon?"

"That ver' 'portant," said Harry, scratching his scarred cheek.

"*Treasuh!*" Peter had his forearms crossed on the table and gazed vaguely into space.

"But then," said Bill, blowing smoke, "if he thinks we got treasure, won't he wonder why we don't pay instead of want credit?"

Harry frowned in moody perplexity. "That right. Damn," he said.

"If I could bamboozle Madame Gruen —" Bill stopped, blew smoke at a beam. A reflective grin spread across his face. Hazily he saw vast possibilities in being thought to have treasure. Madame Gruen was a great gabbler.

"I can sho' tell um about treasuh!" said Peter. "Yuh jus' let me git ashore!"

"You're thinking about free drinks. Well, they're something in 'emselves! All right, we'll all ashore."

When they hit the beach, the half breed mate and the big black nigger took out for the shanty bars. A handsome fellow, that glossy black Peter, with the sheen of velvet on his hide and the glint of white pearls in his mouth.

Captain Bill brought up at Madame Gruen's hotel.

Madame was a half-caste, a big woman, fat, not respectable. She was habitually sloppy through the day in loose highly colored dressing gowns, but fixed herself up for the evening. Many ladies of the town and plantations called her a horrid person, and thought it shameful that men folks, even their own if not watched, would loiter about her ramshackle house, eating dinners in the moonlight-like glow of dangling Chinese lanterns on the veranda, waited on by the prettiest girls of the island.

Madame Gruen, a loose purple beflowered wrapper wafting about her bulky body, was wearing grass slippers, with many cheap rings on pudgy hands. She greeted Captain Bill as if she loved him. She had a smooth slightly hoarse voice, caressing as a cat's purr; also frequently raucous as a parrot's cry. She put an arm about Bill's neck, patted his cheek, and called "Annana!"

Annana came with a flurry of loose muslin about her bare legs, and flowers were in her loose hair. There was welcoming laughter for Captain Bill on her young mouth. She was very pretty and a thorough little heathen. She liked being loved and didn't much care by whom. Among others, she had turned black Peter's head.

"Cognac, child," said Madame Gruen, sweetly as an angel, and holding Captain Bill by the hand she waddled along to her mat-sheltered corner of the verandah and sat down on a heap of cushions.

Annana winked at Bill as lightly and furtively as if a flower petal had fallen on her cheek. There was a standing threat that Bill would spank her if ever she married a Chinaman. After she brought the drink she sat on the arm of his chair, leaned lightly against him, and let her slender little brown fingers wiggle about in his hair.

"Well, Bill, what's been happ'nin' to you?" asked Madame with cat-like purr.

Captain Bill swelled up and grinned. "I've had some fortune. No time to stop long this morning, but—" He clapped down the doubloon. "How much you guess a couple kegs of these ought to be worth? . . . Why, it's a Spanish doubloon! Old pirates got 'em by the chests full and hid 'em away in caves! . . . Oh,

it's hard to say what all I found is worth. But you ought 've seen Joblin's eyes when he got a look at some of my treasure this mornin'!"

"Joblin, pah!" She didn't like him. They were rivals. She turned the coin over and over, weighed it in her palm. "Treasure, Bill?"

"And ever' piece of it just as good gold as that!"

Madame Gruen's big breast heaved. "Gold?"

"You know how buried treasure tales have been talked of all through the islands all these years. 'Bout time somebody found some, don't you think?"

"How much, Bill? How much?" Madame Gruen's eyes brightened with a breathless look. Even little Annana's head pressed more affectionately against his rough cheek.

"Now if it got out how much—too many people down here might be trying to take it away from me. But I've got good boys on my schooner. Orders are not to let anybody on board, 'less I'm there."

"But me, Bill? You trust me?"

"Ain't I trusting you? Joblin, he's a smart fellow. Soon as he saw this doubloon he sort of guessed. *You* are the first I've told!"

"Joblin!" She spat the name. "Sell this to me?" she asked. Her tone meant, "Give?"

"Maybe, some day—maybe a lapful!" Bill slapped his pockets. "If the town gets wind that I've got treasure out there—whew! I'll be pestered. Besides," confidentially, "I'm going back to that island. A couple of kegs ain't a hatful to what—" He winked. "Understand? Well, I got to be on my way to meet a fellow. Annana, how you making out with Chinamen?"

She dropped her head, glanced up demurely, murmured, "One rich ol' man he like me ver' much."

Bill fastened gentle fingers on her tiny throat, shook her. "I ain't got the time to choke you now. But I'll be back. 'Bye. 'Bye, Madame."

Captain Bill strode off in a hurry, a little uneasy that Madame might say something about paying for the brandy.

But the dull glint of the doubloon had excited Madame. Before he was out of sight she went as fast as her ungainly weight would let her up the stairs into a dark corridor. She puffed as if blowing gnats away from her face. Without knocking, she opened a door and lurched in heavily. Her voice had a parrot's croak. "Sam! Sam, wake up!"

A bushy faced man stirred into startled motions under the mosquito netting. Her tone and breathless bustle alarmed him. He struck the netting aside with one hand. The other darted like the scurry of a frightened animal under his pillow. His dark eyes glared toward the door she had swung shut.

"What's up? Who's come?" He eyed the door with a look of menace for whoever might follow her in, but also his body stealthily edged out of the bed as if getting ready to run.

"Sam, listen!" She stood before him, shaking her fat arms in excitement. "Bill Jones has found pirate treasure and—"

"Ha, bah!" He had a bad temper and even being eased of his scare made him angry. "You come in here like a storm and give me a start on a cock-and-bull yarn! I've a mind to slap your face!" He drew back his arm.

"But I tell you I saw it!" Madame gasped.

"Saw it? Saw what?"

"Handfuls!" She held out her hands. "And pocketfuls of old Spanish coins. Gold! He has two kegs of it on his ship. And chests and chests of it still on the island where he found it!"

The bearded Samson scrubbed at his head with his knuckles. A side glance toward the pillow let him see that the butt of a revolver was showing. He moved the pillow. "You saw gold?"

"Big handfuls!" She cupped her hands

in agitated pantomime. Convinced that Captain Bill had treasure, she used the readiest means she knew to convince Samson.

At first glance this Samson looked as if he might be a gentleman. He was tall, well made, with a straight nose, and took some care with the trim of his full beard. He had certain swagger airs, and one side of his tongue was smooth. His hands were soft and white.

"You saw it?"

"Saw it!" Madame affirmed, recklessly. "Joblin knows about it, too, so—" She said harsh, very unlady-like things of Joblin.

"Joblin?" He gave her a queer crafty look and his thin lips smiled behind his beard. There were some persons, but Madame was not one of them, who knew that Samson and Joblin often had their heads together, talked low and earnestly.

"Kegs full, Sam! Kegs full!"

Samson swung his feet out of bed and sat brooding as he scratched the bottom of one foot with the big toe nail of the other. "I had bad luck again last night. Cards were against me."

"They've been against you a long time now," said Madame critically.

"Shut up!" Samson snapped with lift of black eyes.

"Oh, Sam, now." That was the cat-purr. He was as handsome a man as Madame had been in love with for some years.

"Get that lunkhead up here tonight and get him drunk. Make him talk."

Madame flapped her hand in a hopeless gesture. "Him? He drinks gallons and don't stagger. I've seen him!"

"You saw gold? Handfuls?" He held out his own hands, cup-like, looked at her intently.

"And his pockets were full, too!"

"Pour me a drink. I've got to think. That big lunkhead! It's his kind that have all the luck, damn him!" He took the drink, downed it. "Now get out. I want to think."

After she had gone, Samson brooded for a time, scratching thoughtfully deep in his beard.

His lips moved in a mutter: "I'm going to have another talk with Joblin. By God, I need money. If he tries to keep putting me off and off much longer, I'll—"

The mutter stopped. He seemed in some doubt as to just what he would do.

CHAPTER V

Captain Bill Is a Calamity

CAPTAIN BILL grinned vastly to himself as he followed a roadway that twisted out of town toward the hills. At the edge of the town he turned into a wide path and so up to a low verandah that girdled a weather-worn small house where a black boy grinned at him.

Bill found Dr. Kelkey breakfasting at a rattan table with a book propped up against the sugar bowl.

"Hell-lo, Bill!" said the Doctor joyfully, laying aside his napkin to rise and reach for Captain Bill's hard tarry hand.

Dr. Kelkey was not middle aged but looked old. He was half gray, sickly, wrinkled, cynical, and kind. These days he was having more trouble with his wife who, in a jealous pet, had gone to her uncle, a planter. He didn't mention that, never mentioned his trouble; but being lonely was the more glad to see Bill, of whom he approved as a normal healthy animal that poked people he didn't like on the nose and put his arms about pretty persons on the public street. He had once gone on a voyage with Bill.

"Have some breakfast, Bill? Jalo, drop a half dozen eggs in the pan. Bill will have breakfast. Bring out the cold joint. And make coffee. And bring the brandy."

Jalo pattered off. Dr. Kelkey put a

marker in his book and laid the book aside. "Where you been, Bill? What you been doing?"

Captain Bill rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand, looked about, leaned closer, grinned. "See this thing?"

Dr. Kelkey took the doubloon, turned it about. "Where'd you steal it, Bill?"

"Found it!"

"Found it?"

"Yeah. Found it! On an island."

The Doctor eyed him, saw the grin, said, "You're a liar."

"Ain't," said Bill, widening his confessional grin. "Not much of one. I just put a little fancy scrimshawing on the truth and fooled Joblin and Madame Gruen!"

"How? What for? What you up to, Bill?"

"Here's the way of it, Doc." Captain Bill spread his elbows and told the truth.

Dr. Kelkey sipped tea, smiled attentively, looked pleased, nodded in approval. "I'll be joyously damned! You're a calamity to these parts, Bill. I'll be double damned!"

"But the kink in my hawser that I can't see no way to straighten, is if I got a couple o' kegs o' gold why do I want credit for gear and trade?"

"Hm." Dr. Kelkey rubbed the coin with a touch of affection. "That's the basic trouble with lies, Bill. They always leave some slack somewhere that won't come out." He frowned thoughtfully, tossed the coin to the table cloth. "Still, in your case—see here, old coins are worth money. I mean as curiosities. There are people called numismaticians, or something like it, that collect them. Of course, two kegs full would ruin the market. Still, your coins can be all kinds."

"Mine," said Bill, "are gold!"

"But what are you going to do about showing them? When it comes to laying out chandler gear, Joblin may want to have a look at the security."

Captain Bill shook his head in troubled uncertainty. "Don't know, Doc."

"Of course, if you still have some chests of it left on that cannibal island, you can sell shares in a treasure hunt."

Bill rubbed his nose with the knuckle of a forefinger. "All I want is some trade. I'll take a swing through the islands with knives, tobacco, muskets, flash junk."

"Everybody knows you are a good trader when you want to be. Why not put it up to Joblin? Let him go halves. He needs money."

"Joblin? Needs money? If he ain't rich, who is?"

"He's having trouble, I hear. Overreached himself with land. Hard up for money though I personally am convinced he has just cheated a young woman—mere girl—out of some twenty thousand dollars he rightfully owes."

"He's cheated me plenty. I wouldn't go pardners with him—'cept maybe in my treasure hunt!"

Breakfast came. Bill ate a half dozen fried eggs, two chunks of cold beef, drank a pint of black coffee, drank a half bottle of brandy, then drew his pipe.

"Well, if you really want to try this treasure hoax," the Doctor advised, "I'd say, Bill, about the best thing you can do from now on is to talk as little as possible about it. No matter how smart a liar is, he trips over his own feet if he keeps going. Just look pleased with yourself. Say little. Act as if you were sorry the story got out. That'll set people to using their own imagination. Do that for a few days and see what happens. As for real treasure," the Doctor added, looking at the empty dishes, half empty bottle, brawny muscular body, the child-like blue of Bill's eyes and contagious grin. "You are one of the richest men on earth! Money, all of it that ever passed into a king's coffers or went blood-stained through pirates' hands, couldn't buy that body of yours."

Captain Bill grunted, not clearly seeing the point.

"If you had a few headaches and my dyspepsia, you'd know! About the treasure. Peter's likely to overdo the tale. Harry won't, being a taciturn cuss. But I suggest that you get them both back on board. Handle the treasure story yourself — mostly by saying nothing about it."

"Pete's an awful liar," Bill agreed in a tone of commendation.

"But by the way, Bill. If a treasure story gets out, won't you have trouble with that piratical Frenchman, Black Pierre? He's sure to—how do you sailors say it?—lay aboard you, get thwart your hawse or something."

"Black Perry round here?" Captain Bill grinned as if asking the whereabouts of a friend.

"He's the nearest to an old-time pirate we have left. You've had a lot of trouble with him, haven't you?"

"Hell, Perry's not a bad fellow. Just no trusting 'im; that's all. And it's best to lick 'im ever'time you get a chance. He's full of tricks. On the beach at Savu-Savu I fought one of his men for a storms'l. New one. Prizefighter that Perry'd hauled around till he caught up with me. I had to get up three times before I hit that fellow onct. But I got the sail. That was before we had a row over the girl and—"

"All your rows seem to be over girls, Bill?"

"Mostly, sure. What else the hell is there down here worth fightin' over? Perry drifted 'longside of me in the dark and got aboard. Him and his men. Harry put a knife in his back. His men jumped overboard. Me and the girl nursed Perry for near a month. Then damn if she didn't run off with him. He sent me a case of champagne for to celebrate his wedding!"

Dr. Kelkey laughed. "Friendly enemies, eh?"

"He's not a bad un." Bill rubbed his palm together, stared meditatively.

"You're about the only one in the islands to say so."

"Having had the most trouble with 'im," said Bill goodhumoredly, "I know him best."

CHAPTER VI

Black Peter Drinks the Gin

THE TOWN by midafternoon was abuzz over Bill's treasue. In the stores, in the bars, in the club, on the beach, was gabble and hum about pirate gold. Men forgot the siesta. Many in town not being less imaginative or more accurate than Madame Gruen said also they had seen handfuls of doubloons. Bill's life and adventures were talked of; thus it was suddenly realized that he had always been lucky.

Peter, given free gin in shanty bars, blabbed to gape-eyed roughs and beachcombers. He was drunk as a lord and warned hearers it was all confidential. "Cap Bill, he'd sho' skin me alive," said Pete.

"Blimy hif we hever peep!" . . . "Right-o, Pete. Jes' between us frien's!" . . . "Yer sye there is a cave of gol' and jooels?"

Peter sagged and reeled, rolled his eyes, spoke in thick-lipped whispers. A cave, yes. He had seen jewels scattered among dead men's bones. Big iron bound chests were rotted and bursting with gold. The chests being rotten, they couldn't be carried. And cannibals had charged on the treasure hunters, caught them miles from the beach.

"What beach, ol' Pete, me lad?"

Peter rocked back with indignant gleam in his eyes. "Neveh yuh mind!" He wasn't yet drunk enough; so there was much singing out, "'Ave hanother swig, Pete?"

Peter said they had taken off their trousers, tied strings about the legs, poked gold into them. They had to fight

their way through the bush back to the beach. Peter had filled his own trouser legs to such great weight that he had to spill a half of the gold.

"Gor blimy, himagine that!"

Harry, sent by Captain Bill, searched him out and took Peter back to the schooner. The half breed mate was so evasive under the questioning of helpful men who aided in steering Peter to the beach that they were convinced Peter had not exaggerated—much. And what Peter had told was retold until even the hightoned planters repeated the tale among themselves.

It was dance night at the club. The talk there, too, just as much as in the shanty bars, was of "treasure."

Dr. Kelkey, indolent and cynical, lounged in a cane chair, sipped champagne and was amused at the excited gabble. Some of the planters had even tried to get Captain Bill to come in for a drink and a chat, but he shied away. One repeated to another what he had heard, what he thought. It amused the cynical doctor that no one seemed skeptical about the treasure itself. A few suggested perhaps it wasn't to be counted by great chestfuls. They said that in stories of the kind there was always a tendency to exaggerate.

The Doctor was not a dancing man. He lay sprawled in his cane chair in the shadow of tall ferns and Madge Lewis came up to him.

There was no person in the world for whom the Doctor had ever felt half as sorry as for her. She had soft brown eyes that glowed with frankness and a pretty but saddened face. Her story was tragic. She was an orphan, without a dollar left in the world though it was the common opinion that Joblin probably owed her some twenty thousand. It seemed that about the best Madge could do now was to marry a prim old conceited fellow who tried to pretend that he wasn't sixty or more. Dr. Kelkey was already having trouble with his own jealous wife or he would have openly taken the unfortunate girl under his wing.

Madge said quite eagerly, "I hear that you know this Captain Bill Jones, Doctor."

Dr. Kelkey thought, "Um-hm, even your lovely eyes brighten at treasure, heh?" He said, "Why yes, I have that honor."

She sat on a wicker stool beside him, and still eager, "Is this the same Captain Jones that had the *Bumboy*?"

"The very same, my child."

"Oh, then you know about the *McCullough*?"

"I've heard of her. But not from Captain William Jones! He'd rather talk of his fights with the police, things like that."

"And is he really a holy terror?" Her voice was still eager as if she wanted affirmation.

"I," said the Doctor, musing as he eyed the end of his cigar, "have never found him so. But rather jolly."

"They arrested him once in Sydney and the papers had that much"—with a gay litle air, as if pleased, she measured off a foot or two in space—"about what a lot of men it took. I read it dozen times!"

"Ah, but I never suspected you of favoring lawless persons!"

"You can't make me ever believe anything bad of Captain Bill! And my father had a friend pay the fine and settle the damage so no one would ever know my father did it. He was afraid to let Captain Bill know. Afraid it might encourage him to make more trouble, break up more pubs, if he knew."

"Why on earth did your father do that?"

"Oh, didn't you know daddy, mother and I were on the *McCullough*?"

"I did not. And I thought I had all your secrets!"

"Captain Bill stood by in a terrible storm. Standing off and on with that

reef under his lee. Oh, it was crazy and magnificent! You know I grew up at sea. My father—and there wasn't a better captain ever lived than daddy!—said it was the bravest piece of skillful seamanship he had ever seen. And you should have heard the *McCullough's* captain bless Captain Bill. I don't mean a sea-blessing—I mean as they do in churches!"

"About the only one Bill ever got, I'll wager," said the Doctor.

"Of course, daddy wouldn't leave the *McCullough* until all the women and children were off. Mama wouldn't go till daddy went. And I wouldn't go until both mama and daddy went. When we did go—I was just a child, about fourteen—it has been five years, you know! —Captain Bill took one look at me. He roared, 'Why the hell wasn't this child in the first boat?' "

"I'll bet he roared!" the Doctor agreed.

"When it was explained, he patted my head and said something nice. I don't know what. I was frightened to death. Such a big fierce man with a voice that more than boomed. It exploded! I remember just how he looked. It was so cold, and the wind whipped the tips off waves so that they struck you as if somebody lashed with wet whips. He was bareheaded. He wore a checkered shirt that was tar-spotted and wide open at the throat. His trousers were rolled to the knees. He was barefooted. When he shouted orders he leaned into the wind and his voice carried through the storm."

Dr. Kelkey said softly, "Bill shows up best in storms and fights."

"Tonight when I heard people talking of a Captain Bill Jones, I wondered if he were *my* Captain Bill and—"

"The very same, Madge."

"I am so glad he has found treasure. It seems right that he, of all men, should!"

Dr. Kelkey took her hand, smiled, hesitated, glanced about to see that they were alone. "Listen, child. If I tell you something, you won't ever never tell?"

Madge crossed her heart with playful little gestures.

"There is no treasure."

"Oh, don't say that!" She looked honestly pained. The Doctor had thought to amuse her.

He said, "Well, don't you tell it! Some heartsick fellow had an old Spanish coin that he drew away because it was an unlucky pocket piece. Bill picked it up, oh two or three months ago. He's broke. Dead broke. Came ashore this morning to try for a little credit on stores and trade so he could take a swing through the islands and pick up a little something. He showed the coin in Joblin's, hoping it would be good for a drink or two. Joblin got so excited over the old coin that Bill let him—and helped a bit! —imagine that there was treasure. He went back on board and told his boys. Even the cook. Or especially that cook who came ashore and seems to have done a fine job of romancing about jewels glittering among dead men's bones in an old cave where great chests of gold are bursting through rotten oak!"

Madge dropped her eyes, said simply, "I am so sorry."

He had heard that phrase all of his life. It was said to a wife when her husband died. It was said to a girl when you jostled her teacup. It was said to a stranger when you bumped him. But this seemed real.

"I'll wager Captain Bill would be mighty glad to see you, Madge."

"Do you mean he hasn't a thing in the world?"

Dr. Kelkey bit his lip, hard. Here she, poor child, didn't have a thing in the world except a dandified old gentleman's offer of marriage, and she seemed a lot more sorry for Captain Bill than for herself.

"The schooner, of course. And he'll make out, Madge. If he works it right, now that people think he is rich, he can have all the credit he wants."

She shook her head, sat moodily with hand to cheek. "No. Anybody would be suspicious that he hasn't anything at all if he asks for credit. I think I would do anything on earth for Captain Bill!"

"Why, you silly child," said the Doctor. "I should think you had troubles enough without—"

She smiled a little with gay bravery that masked anguish. "After all, Mr. Warren is only a little over three times my age."

"Don't do it, Madge. You still love that boy you told me of and—"

"And he has forgotten me long ago. I know sailors!"

"You don't believe that."

CHAPTER VII

Captain Bill Has a Little Turn-To

IT WAS along about midnight when a rough sailor-looking man came hurrying into Joblin's bar where Bill was drinking everything put before him.

"Cap," the fellow bawled, "yore nigger cook has been in a fight an' is bad hurt!"

Captain Bill pushed back his chair, rising. "I sent him out to the schooner this afternoon. He ashore again?"

"Knifed!"

"Take me to 'im. If he ain't dying I'll beat him to death. Go get himself knifed when we're used to his cooking—and wouldn't like anybody else's."

No moon was up but the night was clear. They hurried along the one-sided street, passed darkened stores, passed the Chinamen's shops where lights burned dimly and showed at the edge of mats hung as curtains. They went on past native houses.

"It's over there," said the man and pointed toward a dim-lit hut almost smothered under foliage that looked black and solid in the darkness.

Captain Bill hurried forward, strode in. "Where's Pete?"

Three men were there. Hard cases. One held a leveled revolver. Two others had stout sticks in hands, knives in sheaths. The guide made a fourth and stopped at the door; gleefully: "Well, I brung 'im!"

Bill blinked about, having a look at the fellows. The leader was a tall man who had a mouth like a scar and tight slit eyes. His name was Blake.

"Nice rig up," said Bill. "But at that, I'd rather have it this way than find Pete with his throat cut."

Captain Bill wasn't at his best. He had been drinking all day, half the night, felt a little fuzzy and slack.

It was an old empty hut, long abandoned by natives. The roof thatch had rotted in spots. A lantern dangled from a piece of cord.

"We hear you found treasure!" said Blake. "We," he grinned, "are glad!"

Bill grunted. "So that's it." He leaned heavily against the side of the hut, hoping it would give way.

"Get away from there! No tricks!" Blake drew a bead at Bill's head. "We are goin' out to your schooner an' lay aboard."

"Well, go on," said Bill.

"You are goin' along. We're goin' to see about that gold. An' you do as told!"

"Am I grumblin'?" Bill asked.

A man laid hold of each of Bill's arms while Blake stood behind. They marched him out and turned toward the beach. Blake kept reminding him of the gun close at the back of his head.

There was a boat drawn high up on the sand. It was not a big boat. They made Bill drag it into the water. One man sat up in the bow. They made Bill get in, facing astern. The other three got in, putting the boat down by the stern, low in the water. There were two sets of oars, but they told Bill to row.

He pulled away. After a time he asked, "S'posin' you don't find treasure?"

"We'll find it," Blake told him. "We're

taking your schooner. Goin' out to sea."

Bill gave such a heave that the oars bent as a bow bends. That schooner was home and all to him. But he said nothing more.

When the boat was about half way out to the *Marigold* and within a cable's length of an island freighter that had put in for repairs, Bill bent forward in a long backward reach of oars. Then with mighty heave he swept the starboard oar, edge on, out of the water in a swinging blow that pivoted on the oar lock. He jerked with all his weight and strength. The edge of it caught the man at the tiller alongside the cheek.

There were squawked curses as Bill lurched against the starboard gunwale, rocking it under, overturning the boat and diving into the water. The men were dumped out like fish from a basket. They yelped and scrambled.

Bill arose some fifteen feet away, let out a yell. There was something about "my schooner" in his words. With pounding overhand strokes he came at them, deadly as a shark, nearly as much at home in the water. He clapped his hand on the nearest head, fastened his fingers in the hair, swung a fist, jerked the man under, then plunged at another.

In the confusion and starlight he could not tell which was which, did not greatly care. He gulped his lungs full of air, sank, dragging a man down, on down, got his feet on the body and used it as a sort of spring board. With heaving overhand strokes he came to the surface. Bill tossed his head, shaking the wet hair out of his face, puffed like a porpoise and sucked in air. Two men were clinging to the turtle-backed boat.

From the freighter came the hail, "What's the matter out there?"

A man at the boat yelped, "Help! For God's sake—"

Bill rose, shoulders high, treading water. "Treasure!" he jeered and came at them. One, holding to the submerged gunwale, kicked out, striking Bill in the face. Bill caught the foot, heaved back, jerking the man loose and giving the foot a wrench that brought a howl out of the fellow. The howl was choked off short as he went under, face down. The other man, sheath knife in hand, dived through the water, slashing. For a time the three of them threshed about in haphazard fury; then Bill whipped his legs about one of their necks, crossed his legs, squeezing. He fastened his hand in the other man's hair, got a hand on the wrist and twisted till the knife fell. After that, Bill simply lay back, holding them under.

Bill's lungs ached. He grew dizzy. His breast heaved as if trying to burst. He knew it was as hard on them as on him, so he hung on. He let out a little air that bubbled up. That gave him momentary relief, but only for a moment. He felt weak, as if all his joints were unhinged, but held on, floating like a wet log, too heavy to rise to the surface, too light to touch bottom.

Bill let go all holds and with powerful strokes heaved himself up, shot out of the water, gulping.

"Ahoy there!" a voice sang out, close by.

A couple of men on the freighter had jumped into a boat and come.

Bill, breathing hard, swam over to the boat, laid hold.

"Ho, 'f it ain't Captain Bill!" said one, stooping till his nose was almost against Bill's face.

"What on earth you been doin'?" asked the other.

Bill grinned at them in the starlight. "Having a little turn-to with some—" He called them hard names.

"We thought the boat had overturned an' sharks was among you."

"They thought so too," said Bill, pleased. He reached a hand about and rubbed at a gashed shoulder. The sting of salt water made him aware that he had been sliced.

"Some o' old Black Perry's doin's?" one suggested.

"Perry had nought to do with it," Bill told them. "He's no fool. He'd have known I'd overturn the boat and make some hell. These—" Bill called them hard names again, his voice full of indignation. "Got me under a gun and were coming out to seize my schooner!" As a hasty afterthought, "And what treasure's aboard!"

"Treasure!" said one.

The other said, "Aye, we've heard!"

The freighters, being honest men—but, of course, not sailors since they were in steam—added their curses to the thieves.

Bill climbed in, wriggling on his belly over the stern. He gouged with a forefinger at the gash in his shoulder and so learned that it was not deep. He dipped up salt water in a cupped palm and rubbed it into the cut.

CHAPTER VIII

The Madame Comes Aboard

THE next morning Peter, sad-eyed as a dead fish, with a head that throbbed like a beaten drum, grinned wanly into Captain Bill's face and listened to cursing.

". . . next time," Bill concluded, "anybody tells me you been knifed, you'd better be! Understand? I don't like bein' fooled!"

"Last night," Dr. Kelkey impatiently began again, "I learned that Miss Lewis had been on the *McCullough*, and so I came along out here the first thing—"

Bill crunched a sea biscuit, swept a brawny hand at the Doctor, spoke as he chewed:

"I don't want to hear of or see any o' them women. Nor of the damn *McCullough*. Why, one day I was walking on the street at Levuka, minding of my own business, proper, when a woman jumped at my neck, tried to bite me on the cheek, and sprung a leak. Splashed salt water all over my go-ashore togs. All because she'd been on the *McCullough*." Bill banged his fist on the table. "All in hell I cared about the *McCullough* was salvage. And lost that!"

"You," said Dr. Kelkey, dousing a biscuit in coffee by way of breaking on board, "are a liar."

"I ain't. There wasn't a pretty woman on that rotten steamboat. I looked careful. Like allus. Besides, I'm too busy to think about women an'—"

"Pretty ones, even?"

"They're the only kind that take any thinking about. And I got troubles aplenty. So shut up."

"I'll bring her out tomorrow. Let you see for yourself. Then tell you something that'll make you—did you ever feel ashamed, Bill?"

"Nope. 'F a little man licked me I might. But I'm careful. Never fight little men."

The half breed mate called down the skylight. "Boat 'longside. Man an' woman."

Captain Bill hurried up and looked over the side into Madame Gruen's large beaming face. She waggled up a hand, called sweetly, "Hello, Bill."

"What got you out of bed so early?" He stared down into the black bearded face of the stranger dressed as a gentleman in the boat with her and asked, low-voiced, of Dr. Kelkey: "Who's that lobscouse?"

"Mr. Samuel Samson," said the Doctor, not favorably.

"Too bad we ain't got a cargo hoist rigged," said Bill. "Be easier on you, Madame."

Madame, with precarious balance, was fumbling at the sea ladder, steadied by the blacks. She puffed and dangled, got her feet caught in her long dress, swore a little, was pushed and pulled, got to the chains, clutched the shrouds and

crawled backwards onto the deck.

Bill's exertion in helping started the blood in the gash on his shoulder. She saw it and was anxious.

"Oh, I got a doctor here handy," said Bill.

Madame looked at the Doctor and sniffed a vague greeting. "This is Sam, Sam Samson," she said, introducing her companion.

She had heard about Bill's fight with the thieves, gushed thankfulness that he hadn't been robbed.

Captain Bill looked at Samson whose eyes roved about the *Marigold's* deck. Both he and Madame seemed a little embarrassed by the Doctor's presence; but she soon got to her purpose and coaxed, "Bill, you are one of my boys. And Bill, I am dying to have a peek at all that treasure!" Her air of expectant assurance brightened.

"Hell ablaze," said Bill, "after last night, I stowed it all away, careful. So now if anybody does lay aboard—well," he grinned, "I bet nobody even can find it!"

Madame and Samson stared at each other. She twitched her hat, straightened her skirt, sighed. Samson fingered his beard and got thoroughly interested in the upper rigging.

She looked about, urged Bill to come to dinner, said this and that, fidgeted, tried to act as if not disappointed, and presently with much grunting and groaning swung down the ladder and again into the boat.

As it rowed off, Bill rubbed his nose with the back of his hand and said, "That Samson's the two ends and the bight of a rogue."

"How do you guess that, Bill?"

Bill loosed a ripple of oaths: ". . . it's enough to look at him, ain't it?"

"It wasn't for some of the men ashore. They had to play a good deal of cards before they suspected. Now," the doctor chuckled, "they are all in together to cheat him. He thinks it's just their fool luck. And I wouldn't put it past his scheming to marry Madame and get control of her property just to sell out to Joblin—and skip. There is something brewing between those two."

Shoreward, Madame Gruen passed a canoe in which Joblin was being paddled to the *Marigold*. She spat in the water and tilted her nose.

Joblin climbed on deck with a friendly smirk wrinkling his lean face, chattered about the attempted robbery, offered congratulation. Bill hammered the heel of his palm with inverted pipe bowl, put the pipe in his mouth, said:

"It's all safe hid now. Stowed out of sight."

"The whole two kegs, Bill."

"Yep."

"Kegs are big things to hide, Bill."

"Ho, it's not in kegs now. Just stowed."

"You haven't saved any out to spend?" Joblin asked.

"To spend? I should say not!" Bill was wonderfully emphatic. "Not till I've had my gold dollars overhauled by a nu-mis-man."

"A what, Bill?"

Bill glanced edgewise at Dr. Kelkey. "Nu-mis-man, Joblin. That," Bill explained with the air of one pleased to give out information, "is a fellow as will pay ten times more'n a thing's worth just for the pleasure of having something somebody else ain't got." Again he glanced at the Doctor, who was staring seaward, trying not to laugh.

"But you'll be needin' stores, Bill?"

Bill pricked up his ears, looked pleased.

"Get anything you want from me, Bill. Just leave a bag or two of them doubloons in my safe as security and—"

"As what?" demanded Bill, indignant.

Joblin was placating and plausible. "You are engaged in a hazardous enterprise, Bill. Going back to that island, aren't you?"

"You give me credit when I was hauling niggers!"

"But the planters you recruited for were surety, Bill. Business is business, you know."

When Joblin went ashore, Bill clattered the doubloon on a hatch and spoke: "Doc, that damn doubloon ain't so lucky after all." The damn doubloon, as if aware of being unwanted, bounced and rolled toward the scupper. Bill scrambled for it. "And did you notice, Doc, how sick people look when I tell 'em I've hid my treasure?"

All day canoes and boats brought visitors to the *Marigold*. Merchants, hopeful of trade. Planters, just curious. Beachcombers, coaxing for a chance to sign on. Honest seamen, eager to have a whack at adventure—and treasure.

That night Bill sat alone in the cabin waiting for supper. He ran a hand through his hair, took a good hold and tried to think. It wasn't easy with empty pockets.

Peter came strutting in with a chunk of pork on a plate, set it on the table, then moved his big black hand until it was directly over Bill's plate. The hand opened. There was a tinkle of heavy coins. Four five-dollar gold pieces lay there.

Bill said, "What the devil?"

Peter chuckled. "Fellah done give um me foh to put stuff in you all's coffee."

"What kind of stuff?"

"He say make yuh an' Harry sleep. Then him an' his mates come aboa'd an' find ouah treasuh. He gwine give me hundred dollars then. I sho' did reach out an' grab these heah!"

"What fellow?"

"Little fellah with long nose an' one laig short. Yessuh, he sho' pomised foh to take good care ob me."

"I'm damned," said Captain Bill, fingering the gold. "When's all this to be?"

"He say purty soon. He come out today foh to see if I'm sma't. I sho' am. We need grub!"

Bill rose up and said, "You damned good-for-nothin' nigger, you! Swindle a trusting business man out of his investment!" Then he wooled the nigger's head with rough affection. "I'd like to know who's back of the trick. What about the crew? How's he going to quiet them?"

"I don't know, Cap Bill. I promised foh to put pizen in you all's coffee foh twenty dollar. I say as how I hope I hope they find ouah treasuh 'cause you all done hid it from me. I say I'm mighty glad foh to git even with you."

"It's not one of Madame's tricks. She'd get me ashore and put knockout drops in herself. It's nobody off the beach. Nobody there has got twenty dollars. This"—Bill made the coins jingle—"is money. Big money. That doubloon ain't so damn unlucky after all."

CHAPTER IX

"My Dad Was An Old Man-o'-War's Man"

BILL stood at the rail nearly amidships eating oranges out of a sack of plaited banana leaves. He would bite, squeeze, suck, and with all the force he had fling the orange at the kinky head of the half naked Peter who sat on an overturned bucket, peeling potatoes before the galley door. The black cook grinned as he watched out for Bill's throws, and would duck slightly, moving his head this way or that; and wasn't hit.

"To hell with you," said Bill. "I've et more now than I wanted, just hopin'!"

He took a few steps forward and tossed what was left in the sack at Peter who caught the sack, fished out an orange and began to eat.

Bill spread his forearms on the rail, humped his back, lay there peering toward the beach. A boat was coming out, rowed by natives. He watched idly, noting that a man and a woman were passengers. Soon he could tell they were making for the *Marigold*.

As they drew near he walked to the

main chains. He now decided that that the woman was a girl. To his simple-minded way of thinking, there was a big difference. He got on well with girls.

She sat with head lifted, looking up, one hand holding up the brim of her straw hat above her eyes. Bill grinned at her. She was pretty and her smile back at him was as warming as a big drink of gin.

The man with her was not to Bill's liking, having the look of a rather over-ripe dandy. He held a gold headed cane between his knees. Bill sniffed, suspecting, even at that distance, that the old fellow used perfume. His whites were spotless, creased, and he held himself as if afraid any movement might spoil the creases. There was a big flower in his lapel. He called in a thin voice:

"Captain Jones?"

"Sure," said Bill.

"We are friends of Dr. Kelkey."

Bill thought, in that case, maybe the old dandy was better than he looked, and sent the sea ladder rattling down. "Come right on board!"

The natives put the boat under the ladder. The girl stood up, stepped with easy balance on a thwart, looked straight at the ladder. As she felt the boat come to the peak of the slight ground swell running through the bay, she gave a jump, laid hold, kicked her feet free of the skirts, and came climbing as if running up stairs.

Captain Bill put his hands under arm pits, swung her up and set her lightly on deck. "You," he said, "are a sailor!"

Her brown eyes were very staring and her mouth was laughing. "I am at least a sailor's daughter. And you have helped me over the side before."

"When was I that lucky?"

"I was on the *McCullough!*"

"You?"

"I!"

"Ho," said Bill, brightening, "then you are that Miss Lewis the Doc's talked about."

"It has been five years, Captain Bill. But you haven't changed. Just the weather."

Bill was staring too intently to make reply.

She said, "Perhaps you had better give Mr. Warren a hand. He isn't a sailor."

"Who is he?"

"He is acting as consul while the consul is away."

Bill said, *"Humpf."* He didn't like consuls, acting consuls, or their relatives. When they got to windward of him it was usually with some complaint or other. "What's he up to?"

The girl laughed, so clearly did his puzzled frown let her see what was in his mind. "Nothing like that, Captain Bill! Dr. Kelkey couldn't come with me. There is an outbreak of measles among the natives across the island. He had to go. He asked Mr. Warren to bring me."

Bill looked over the side where the Acting Consul, a little fretful at seeming to be ignored, eyed the sea ladder in timid awkwardness. It would have been easier to climb without the cane but Mr. Warren held to it.

"I'll give you a hand," said Bill.

On deck, Mr. Warren, somewhat rumpled by Bill's vigorous assistance, fidgetted in straightening the creases, touched the flower to make sure it was in place and, as a kind of afterthought, put out his hand. Bill inhaled slowly, a queer look in his eyes. He had guessed right. Mr. Warren used perfume. Also, though he clung to the cane, Mr. Warren didn't seem to be crippled.

"So you have found *treasure*, Captain Jones."

"Sure," said Bill, as if picking up treasure were nothing much in his life. "Come over here and set in the shade." He bawled, "Pete! Put some chairs under the awning."

The awning was a brown old patched, but neatly patched, sail stretched forward of the deckhouse.

Mr. Warren, resting his hand on the

head of the cane, took on an important bearing as if about to make a speech. He began, "My young friend here, Miss Lewis"—he bowed slightly toward Miss Lewis—"her father, and mother, also, were on the ill-fated *McCullough,* so you can imagine the sense of indebtedness that she—"

"Rats," said Bill. The glossy Pete, with his best air of eagerness, was putting chairs under the awning. "Let's set down," Bill urged.

The girl did not take her glowing eyes off him. She saw in the great sun-burned and scarred fellow, now shirtless, with a mop of tangled brick-red hair, the frowning giant of the storm-driven schooner. In her seaman's daughter heart she was glad that her Captain Bill did not look, as she had half feared he would, much like other men and a little civilized. He wasn't quite as big, not as much of a giant, as he had seemed to her anxious child eyes; but he did look a glorious sea ruffian. His face was bony and hard, but his blue eyes had laughter in them. His body was scarred. There was a fresh gash on his shoulder, long and discolored. Seemed to be healing all right, but would leave another cicatrice.

Bill's medication for cuts was salt water to cleanse and a plaster of chewed tobacco to heal.

Mr. Warren, in a kind of dainty fussiness, drew a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket, slapped at the seat of his chair and sat down with an air of being afraid of tacks. He extended his right arm, hand on the cane's knob, and leaned back, much as if to make another speech:

"Captain Jones, you and your good fortune are much talked of and—"

"'Spose so," said Bill. He turned to the girl: "Where'd you learn to hand-over-hand a sea ladder?"

"I've been at sea, grew up at sea, Captain Bill."

"Her father," said Mr. Warren, pitching his voice to a tone that seemed to rebuke Bill for not paying more attention to him, "her father was Captain Lewis of the S. S. Trading Company."

"Oh, him," said Bill, dully, and feeling at once sad and very sorry for the girl.

Madge Lewis looked away, pressed her lips.

Mr. Warren, seeming to enjoy the sound of his own voice, spoke as if to an audience:

"Captain Lewis, not long ago, was most foully murdered at Sydney and—"

"I heard," said Bill. He gave Mr. Warren a glaring look that meant, "You old fool, you, why you want to talk about that in front of *her!*"

Mr. Warren merely cleared his throat and went on: "Though there is a reward, a very large reward, offered by the S. S. Trading Company, no trace of the murderer—"

Bill turned his back on Acting Consul Warren, dropped into a chair by Madge. She faced him, smiled wistful and brave. Sadness lay under the smile. Bill felt like wringing the dandified Warren's old neck.

"I mind 'twas said Captain Lewis kept his wife and little girl with him at sea. But," Bill asked admiringly, "if you growed up at sea, where'd you learn your manners?"

Madge put out a hand, let it rest on his knee. "My mother spanked, Captain Bill!" She smiled of course, but her troubled look settled on his big hard face with a kind of unconsciously hopeful stare, as if the childhood admiration of her Captain Bill still inspired an eager trustfulness.

"My dad was an old man-o'-war's man and used rope-end! Good for us, hm?"

Mr. Warren tapped the deck with the cane, cleared his throat. "As I was saying, Captain Jones—"

Madge arose, asked brightly, "May I look about your schooner, Captain Bill?"

Bill thought she was trying to escape the thin slow voice of old Warren who

wasn't through talking of the murder. "Sure. I'll show you—"

"No, no, alone if I may. Mr. Warren would like to talk with you. May I go below?"

"Hold your nose."

"Oh, we carried copra, too. I don't mind it!"

Bill watched her go. Only a youngster, nineteen or so, and dainty, but carried herself as a proper seaman's daughter should—sweet and smiling, with chin up in spite of everything.

Mr. Warren shifted the cane, drew the silk handkerchief, patted his forehead, carefully tucked the handkerchief away, cleared his throat. "Um—hmm—mm—Madge," he said, faltering a little, "knew it was necessary for me—mm—a few words alone with you, Captain Jones."

Bill eyed him from under shaggy brows, head lowered, with much the look of a bull that is thinking of going into a china shop.

Mr. Warren seemed a little embarrassed. He put both hands on the cane's knob, leaned forward. "A very difficult situation, Captain Jones. Very difficult. I fear you will think me a designing person—"

All of which was mysteriously like nonsense to Captain Bill. He said, "Why not out with it?"

"Um-mm-m—well, I wonder, sir, if you would permit me to invest a little in the further treasure venture you are about to engage in?"

Bill eyed him with less of a glower but vaguely suspicious. This might be fine. He most certainly would permit Mr. Warren to give him a thousand or so, but was cautious about seeming eager. "Why you think I might when I've had some luck?"

"That," said Mr. Warren plaintively, "is just the trouble. I explained to Madge that there was no reason why—"

"You what? What's she to do with it?"

Mr. Warren smiled in a labored silly way, wiped his face some more. "I am sure you will be sympathetic, Captain Jones, when you understand"—he smirked coyly. "When you understand that I expect to—umm—make Miss Lewis my wife."

"Understand what?" said Bill with a sound as if using cuss words.

Mr. Warren again cleared his throat. "Her father's affairs were left in a very bad muddle. In fact, my acquaintance with the charming young lady grew out of her coming to the island recently in relation to a debt of considerable amount Mr. Joblin was supposed to have owed —"

Bill said slowly, eyes narrowing, fingers gradually closing into fists: "Joblin won't pay that girl what he owes her?"

"Oh, unfortunately, Captain Jones, there is no evidence of the debt available. Mr. Joblin says he settled in full shortly before the murder—"

"You're Acting Consul. Why don't you do something about it? Nobody 'd believe Joblin on a stack of Bibles that high!" Bill measured to the height of a great array of Bibles.

"But Mr. Joblin insists that he paid and destroyed the note. There is no way to prove he did not. It was almost due at the time of the murder. Miss Lewis was under the impression that the note was in the fire-proof safe, which was not even locked. They pillaged everything, taking even old letters. Quite naturally she thought the note had been stolen and perhaps destroyed with other papers useless to the thieves. Being in desperate need, she came here. I have been acting as her adviser. But there is nothing that can be done in the face of Joblin's statement which, after all, may be correct, that he had shortly before paid the note."

"Crack him a few times with that gold-headed cane!"

"The process of law must be observed," said Mr. Warren, severely.

"Why don't the law use some sense?

Joblin knows the note was stole. No use to the thieves—they'd burn it along with other stuff they wanted to get rid of. Joblin's a liar."

"But Captain Jones—"

"What the hell's all that got to do with you buying a share in my treasure hunt? Next one, I mean."

Again Mr. Warren smirked, touched his tie daintily. "A woman's odd whim, Captain Janes. Women are very very whimsical. I love her devotedly and—"

Captain Bill tried to smother the grunt but didn't.

"—she has consented to become my bride on condition that I persuade you to let me invest, say, a thousand dollars in your treasure venture." Mr. Warren beamed coaxingly.

"Why'd she say that?"

Mr. Warren waggled his head in mystification. "It seems just a whim. Though I am inclined to believe that she has such faith in your good fortune that she feels the investment will be very profitable. Some women are intuitive and—"

"I'm going to keep my treasure all to myself," said Bill."

"A thousand dollars is a large sum of money, Captain Jones.'

"I 'spose. To some people."

"Now if you and I could make some arrangement whereby it would look as if I had invested the amount—hm—I would certainly make it worth your while, Captain Jones."

"How much?"

"A little present of say," Mr. Warren looked generously enthusiastic, "a hundred dollars!"

Bill snorted. " 'F I don't need a thousand, why the hell you think I'd take a hundred?"

"But think of her future, Captain Jones. A devoted husband, a home, protection from the world, security, affection and—"

"And a granddad for a husband!"

Mr. Warren drew back as if dodging Bill's fist. The words stunned him. His lips trembled, trying to form words, but Bill went on, recklessly:

"If you love her, why the hell don't you be good to her? Make her happy. Take care of her till some nice boy her age comes along. You've got her crowded up in a corner so there's no sure way to get food and clothes and a place to sleep without marrying you. That's bad as kidnappin' her—like Black Perry does his women. Only his women are glad to have 'im steal 'em!" Bill was on his feet. "To hell with you!"

Mr. Warren, flushed of face, fumbled with the cane. He glared and again his lips twittered noiselessly in angered haste to say something, but nothing came until: "I was never so addressed before in my life!" He got out of the chair, trembling. He called shrilly, "Madge! Madge! Come! Let us leave this ruffian's ship! Madge!"

From the shrill petulance of his voice, Bill thought she could take warning as to what she might expect as the fussy old duffer's wife.

Madge came with anxious stare at Captain Bill. Mr. Warren strode to the side, clicking the deck with the cane as if trying to poke holes in it. As Captain Bill helped her over the side, she said in a breathless whisper:

"Oh, I had hoped you would. But I am glad now you didn't"

Bill watched the boat until it reached the shore. Then he sat on a hatch, heedless of the sun, smoked, scratched his head in a muddle of bewilderment, and swore, mystified.

CHAPTER X

Old Wallawaggo Burns' Mate

DR. KELKEY, with a package under his arm, came out very late that night looking worn, weary, yet amused. He demanded, yet somehow with approval:

"Whatever the devil, Bill, did you do to old Warren? He's in bed, feverish and excited."

"Hope he chokes."

"I couldn't get sense out of him. Gave him sleeping powders. I'm dead tired but had to come out and hear the story. Brought a bottle. Let's sit and drink."

He passed the package to Bill. There was more than one bottle.

"Doc, you know he wants to marry that girl?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you poison 'im?"

"Might," said the Doctor cheerfully, "but the poor child would only be that much the worse off. Warren's not in any sense a rich man, but he can give her a home. Such as it is, with a maiden sister to criticize! And Miss Warren is very critical. There's not another person that—oh yes, there is a boy she loves, but they quarreled. Hurry with the drinks."

Bill got glasses. They drew up chairs near the skylight. It served as a table.

Bill told what had happened, rippled off oaths, asking: "Why would she make him invest a thousand dollars that way?"

Dr. Kelkey took the cigar from his mouth, put a hand on Bill's arm, spoke softly: "Bill, she's whipped. No way to go that's better than toward the altar with old Warren. But she knows you need money. Knows you have no treasure—"

"How she know?"

"I told her."

Bill grunted. "All right. Keep talkin'."

"I'll bet she'd made up her mind to marry him. He isn't wealthy. A thousand dollars means something to him. So she knew she couldn't get it out of him for you any other way. She just thought since she was going to marry him anyhow that she might as well—"

"She's not going to marry that old goony. Not if I have to steal her myself!"

"And Bill?"

"Yeah?"

"There's something else. I've saved it up till after you saw her. That time you raised the devil at Sydney, it was Captain Lewis settled the damages and paid the fine."

Bill took the pipe from his mouth and stared solemnly at the hills, solidly black in the starlight. He said very calmly. "Was? I allus wondered. Cost him a full hundred pounds." He puffed, meditative. "That means by rights I owe her what her father paid." Long silence. "You say she loves some boy?"

"Young trader named McKenzie."

"Old Wallowaggo Burns' mate?"

"That's the lad. Good sort, isn't he?"

"The best. Listen, Doc. I'll take her to sea. When I find Old Wallowaggo, Mac'll marry her or I'll break his damn neck!"

The Doctor laughed quietly. "I'm sure he's eager. But she is a stubborn miss. They quarreled because he wanted to marry her right after her father's death. She thought it callous of him. He, poor devil, was anxious to give her shelter, protection. She loves him still, of course. Too proud to let him know—even if she had a chance."

"I'll see she gets the chance—and takes it."

"But to sea, alone, on your ship? A girl like that?"

"Why not?" Bill snapped.

"Her reputation?"

"It's her happiness I care about. I ain't going to make her go, but by God I'll give her the chance. May even pretend to discourage her some. No, I won't steal her. I'll steal Warren."

"That's better."

"'Tain't. Five hundred dollars I owe her. Not much for a girl to live on. I get some trade goods—"

"All very fine, Bill. But where's the money coming from?"

"I forgot." Pause. "What about Joblin and her father?"

"Not a chance. Joblin says he paid it.

Nothing to show he didn't. Joblin is, in my opinion, simply counting on the fact that the murderer destroyed everything he carried off that had no value in a pawn shop. Some four thousand pounds! And Joblin, it is said, is desperately pressed for money."

"Think he killed 'im?"

"Why, Bill!"

"I bet he'd kill somebody for less than twenty thousand dollars!"

"He hasn't been off the island for a year."

Bill made a sound of disappointment. "But maybe anyhow if I'd wring his neck a little?"

"And be arrested and fined for maltreating a leading citizen? Acting Consul Warren would make out the report against you to the High Commissioner, who is no longer the same as sat on the *McCullough* case."

Bill emptied a whisky bottle, flung it overboard, opened another, filled his glass. "Looks like I've overplayed my hand in this treasure thing. So I'll go somewhere else, and just make a bargain with somebody to go trading. I'm going to take that girl—if she wants to go. You tell her that. You bring her out and we'll talk. You tell her, by God, as long as two planks hold together, she's got a home if she wants it on my schooner. And when the two planks part, we'll swim over somebody else's and kick 'em overboard—get another schooner!"

"Make her a sort of pirate queen, eh?"

"Ain't. I'm going to make her marry young Mac. He's on the way up. Proper young fellow."

CHAPTER XI

"Please Steal Me, Captain Bill!"

EARLY the next morning Dr. Kelkey came out with Madge. She simply scrambled up the ladder and jumped from the rail into Captain Bill's arms.

"I am going with you, Captain Bill!"

Bill grinned, stepped back with warning finger lifted. The Doctor sat on the rail, listening.

"See here," said Bill. "Let's talk a bit first."

"The doctor told me you said—"

"I know. But we drunk two or three bottles last night. I been thinking. A girl like you alone on—"

"Where on earth could a girl go to be better cared for and more respected?"

"Oh, but you don't know about me. I steal pretty girls and—"

"Please then steal *me*, Captain Bill!"

"This ship ain't what you're used to. There's the smells. And when the bilge is stirred up—"

"I prefer bilge any time to jasmine on a man!"

"The food," said Bill, "is rough and—"

"I love salt pork! And biscuits you have to hit with a hammer to crack!"

"There's cockroaches—they're sort of numerous. An' rats!"

"I make pets of them!"

"Where I go the niggers are pretty wild and bad."

"I grew up behind a boarding net!" She caught Bill's arm. "Stop teasing me. I am going with you, Captain Bill. I'm not going ashore again!"

"Oh yes, you are," said Bill, seriously. "You can't come off till I'm ready to up anchor. If people knew you were stopping out here, this whole town would be doing a war dance down there on the beach—"

"If I want to go?"

"They'd say you were crazy. Me a scoundrel. Make some trouble. That right, Doc?"

"Right," said the doctor.

"But how long must I wait?" she asked.

"Not long. If I can't get some money in a day or two, I'll to sea. See here, why did you try to flim-flam old Warren into treasure shares when you knew I might 've took him up on it? Just 'sposin' I had?"

Madge laughed nervously, tilted back her hat brim. "Perhaps I was wicked enough to hope I could run away with you if you had money for trade!"

"Sensible girl," said Bill. "Now you go back ashore and stay there awhile. Nobody's to know you're going. Me and Pete 'll clean up the cabin and—and 'nother thing. Didn't Doc tell you? Just as soon as we overhaul Mac, you're going to marry him. Will you?"

She flung her arms at Captain Bill's neck, clung to him, pressed her face against his breast. He could feel her head nodding in little quivers of assent.

CHAPTER XII

"Tonight Am the Night"

ALONG about noon, Peter, all awaggle with haste, came from his morning's marketing and climbed on board. He made for Captain Bill who was down in the cabin seeing about making things comfortable for Madge.

"I done met that fellah agin an' tonight am the night!"

Bill put his hands to his hips, looked grave and demanded:

"Get some more money out of him?"

"No suh, but tonight—"

"You don't understand the business of being a proper rogue!" said Bill severely. "Rogues promise and get paid. Then they back down and get some more pay. I bet he was give money to give you. You bein' a simpleton, didn't ask and he's kept it. That's our ship's money he's kept. Ought to be took out of your wages, if ever you get any wages!"

"After you an' Harry is asleep I'm to show a light. A boat is comin' out with some gin foh the crew—"

"'F I catch the smell of gin on you, I'll use your hide for a tarpaulin. Just the right color, and tough!"

"When the crew am asleep, fellahs is a comin' out to search foh ouah treasuh!"

Bill mediated, rubbed his nose. "They think you'll soak up some gin and be knocked out too. They'll have the run of the ship and not a soul to say who they was. You ain't seen anybody but a little fellow—and he'll call you a liar. Fellow behind this rigout would be pretty smart if he wasn't fool enough to believe in treasure!"

That night Bill trimmed a lantern and gave it to Peter to show on the taffrail.

Harry, the mate, was to fall asleep on the forward hatch where he could keep an eye on the crew and see that they played their part. Bill would sprawl on the locker down in the cabin where he could see what went on there.

The lantern hadn't been up more than half an hour when a man alone drew alongside in a small boat. He hailed the schooner softly. Peter called down.

"Ever'thing right?" asked the man.

"Sho' am!" said Peter, gleeful.

"Throw over a line an' haul up this stuff for the crew."

Peter hauled up a gunny sack in which there were three or four bottles. Pretty skimpy allowance to get nine guzzling natives and the capacious Peter himself drunk. A dozen would have been more up to the mark. Nothing free-handed about the rascal behind this scheme.

While the man was making his boat fast and climbing up, Peter shifted out the gin and replaced the bottles with some he had prepared, and was out on deck, sack in hand, to greet the small fellow with sharp nose and twisted leg.

He slapped Peter on the back. "You'll be took care of. Dandy fellow you are!" He peered about. The crew were huddled forward, smoking and chattering. "You sure Bill an' that mate is asleep?"

"Sho' I'm sho'!" said Peter, indignant. He fished out a bottle and showed a corkscrew. "Heah, yuh an' me can have a little drink."

The fellow said quickly, "No, no, I don't want any. Give some to the crew

an' help yerself. I'm goin' to have a look about."

He moved away. Peter's grin deepened. As Bill had guessed it would be, the gin, too, was drugged.

The blacks up forward grabbed at the bottles, gleeful as children playing a game. They struggled with one another, guzzling water.

"I don' know how long befo' this heah stuff am supposed to work," Peter whispered to the lynx-eyed mate who stealthily moved from shadow to shadow, keeping a watch over the long-nosed cripple. "An' 'sposin' somebody sniffs one o' these heah bottles an' sees it ain't gin?"

"I put knife in him." Harry said it as coolly as if talking of cleaning fish; and would do it with as much off-hand readines as if a man were a fish.

The cripple had stared down the skylight and seen Captain Bill sprawled out on the locker. When he returned near the galley, Peter seemed trying not to stagger.

The little fellow rubbed his hands and peered. "Don't you feel a little tired? Want to set down?"

"Sho' ", said Peter. He leaned against the galley and began to ease himself down to the deck. In a moment he was sprawled out.

The little cripple limped about furtively, listening rather than peering. The crew had quieted down. He hurried aft, took away the lantern, blew out the flame.

Down below Bill lay on the locker, growing more and more uncomfortable. His hip bone ached. He had his head, the better to watch the passage, at an angle that was becoming torture. Bill did not dare move. He could not tell when he was being watched through the skylight.

Time dragged on and on. The stern ports were open, but the cabin held the heat of stale air baked all day by the sun. Bill sweated and itched, smothered oaths deep in his throat. For a time there wasn't a sound but the faint squeak of timbers as if, in the dead silence, beams and planks talked together, mysteriously articulate; and the cautious scurry-patter of rats, emboldened by silence.

He heard the faint splash of a boat. The little man's voice called over the side reassuringly. In an instant Bill was up. For a minute or two nobody would be spying down the skylight. He shook himself, scratched, rubbed cramped muscles, wiped sweat from his face and neck, and felt better. He could hear the boat gently bumping the schooner's side. He lay down again, careful to get into the same position.

The shuffle-sound of footsteps was on the companion ladder. There was the metallic click of tools, carried awkwardly. A gruff voice broke out: "No blarsted sense in ac'in' like we was afraid to wake 'em!"

Then Joblin's voice: "We've all night ahead. And we'll tear this tub's ribs from keel till we find it!"

Captain Bill squinted under lowered lashes. A shaggy old fellow with an ax, crowbar, narrow-bladed saw and auger in his hands, came into the cabin. He stopped, looked about, slowly waggled his jaws and spit. Seaman was written all over him from the bulge of his jaw-muscles, enlarged by a lifetime of chewing stuff out of harness casks, to the hip-stiff roll of sea-legs. Joblin, crafty fellow, had engaged a ship's carpenter to pry for treasure.

Joblin, half a cigar in his mouth, moved with angular caution toward Bill. "I'd like to crack him over the head!"

"You ain't goin' to," said the old carpenter. "Pir't gold is any man's as can get it. But no hittin' of a man that's been drugged."

Joblin said, "Look here, Masker. Cutlasses and muskets! Always a demand for them. They'll repay me for the gin an' money I've laid out!"

Masker dropped the tools to the deck

with a clatter. "That's the tradesman in you," he muttered, eying the stand of rifles about the mainmast, the cutlasses racked against the bulkhead. "We lay 'board f'r treasure. You steal knives an' muskets!"

He chose the crowbar, fitted it, pried. There was a shrill squeak as of protest when the heavy staple came out of the wood at the end of the cutlass rack.

"Now the muskets," said Joblin.

Masker bent forward. "This ain't set in wood. Nought f'r a purchase. I'd only break the guns. Le's get about what we come f'r!"

Joblin, tradesman, took down a cutlass, estimating its value. He fitted his hand to the corded hilt, swished the blade.

Masker turned about. "May be behind the ceilin' or let in 'tween decks. Most natural, it's stowed aft where he can have an eye on the place. That's human natur'. But if it's on the ship, I'll find it. Man an' boy, I been ship's carpenter forty year!"

The little cripple, nosing into staterooms, called shrilly. "Hi, looky here! They's been tamperin' with a bulkhead here! Let's have more light!"

Captain Bill, figuring on knocking out the bulkhead between two small staterooms to furnish more comfortable quarters for his fair "partner," had broken loose some boards to have a look at what trouble he was goin' to find. He had roughly knocked the planks back into place.

Masker plied his crowbar, splintering a wedge hole. He drove again, sank his weight on the end of the bar. As the board swayed away the three of them stooped, put heads and noses together as if trying to smell the hidden doubloons.

Captain Bill got off the locker. He had a gun in his pocket but with barefoot lightness took a cutlass from the rack. He moved to the doorway, stood there with a kind of glower-grin at the crouched backs of the three men, huddled low as if sniffing.

"You ain't looking in the right place," said Captain Bill.

The little cripple gave a start that set him back on his haunches as if kicked in the face. He squealed, "Ow God!" The old carpenter, still squatting, popped his eyes and with a kind of dangling lift of forearms let his fingers hang loose. Joblin, face smeared with a look of terror, sprang up, backing off.

Captain Bill took a long stride and with long-armed lurch reached in, deftly swirled his wrist and smacked the flat cutlass along Joblin's cheek, knocking him into a stagger.

"You draw a gun and I'll cut your arm off!" said Bill. His cutlass hissed in downward chop, showing what it would do. "And you there, Chips! Stay down or I'll split your head like a milk nut. Aboard to steal my *treasure!*" Captain Bill sounded as if he had a million on board.

A shadow blacker than the blackness it emerged from sprang out of the passage. Peter, meat cleaver in hand, pressed close. Then the crew at the squat mate's heels swarmed down with slapping patter of feet.

Joblin tried to speak. His tongue stammered in a dry mouth.

"Tried to poison me, my mates and men!" said Bill.

"I-it w-wasn't p-poison!" Joblin said with hasty pleading creak.

"A thief wouldn't lie, would he?" said Bill. "You sweepin's out of a slaver's scupper, it's prison for you, all you!"

"I'll pay, Bill! I'll pay!" Joblin begged.

"Pay?" Bill snorted. "What you think a man with some kegs o' gold wants with a few of your old dollars? Pay! If your so eager to pay what about paying Madge Lewis what you owed her father?"

Joblin's small eyes seemed about to jump out of his head. He backed to the

bulkhead as for support, spoke breathless but with a whine faintly plausible:

"Honest to God, I had paid just before—"

"You're liar!"

"Bill, I paid—"

"Didn't, 'cause if you had, now you'd be dying of a broke heart to think how if you'd waited you wouldn't have had to!"

"Bill, it was a gamble, this trying to steal your treasure. I lost an' I'll pay! Bill—"

"How pay?"

"You need stores. Let me put on board whatever you need an' —"

Bill eyed him with a flicker of yielding.

Joblin hurried on: "Just make out your list an' let me take it ashore an' tomorrow—"

"Ashore! Not this side o' hell! You get ashore, you'd call me a liar. Say you didn't try to steal my treasure. Say you wasn't even on my ship! You worked it so damn clever that nobody'll know where the hell you are if I stow you in the forepeak and go to sea!"

That gave Joblin a scare, that and the way Peter grinned, thumbing the edge of his cleaver.

"Bill," he pleaded, "I'll put on board whatever you want—"

"But you'll have to stay right here on board till my stores are 'longside!"

"But you can't keep—"

"Can't?" said Bill. "Pete, put some of that stuff of his in coffee and we'll give him a drink—'f I have to slit his throat to pour it down!"

"Oh God, no!" Joblin pleaded.

"Then do I get an order for my stores? All I need—or want? And do you stay here till I get 'em alongside? Hm?"

Joblin almost fell over, it hurt him so to nod his head, weakly agreeing.

And so by nightfall the next day, the *Marigold's* deck was covered with goods and stores; Joblin's warehouse was rather bare in spots. Bill had receipts signed in Joblin's noted scrawl, "Paid in full."

Captain Bill hadn't been able to explain that Madge Lewis was going along with him as partner on a trading cruise, so Joblin and Joblin's clerks wondered what the devil Bill was going to do with a brass bed, fluff mattress, a looking glass, with toilet soaps, with pretty soft rugs, with sheets and nearly everything else Bill saw that looked suitable for ladies.

CHAPTER XIII

"Cap'n Bill, They Kill Petuh!"

THE *Marigold* was ready for sea.

One of the crew, skylarking, staggered backwards, tripped over an open hatch coaming and was hoisted out, groaning. Captain Bill, on a stretcher of oars and canvas, took him ashore to Dr. Kelkey.

It was dark when he left the Doctor and returned to the beach. He sent Peter up town for some last minute purchases and went on the ship.

Madge was on board, gleeful and excited as she busily examined all the nice things. "Captain Bill, I believe you must have had treasure—and spent it!"

"Nope. Just a few little weddin' presents for you and Mac—from Joblin."

"It is possible that he did pay father," she said, trying to be utterly fair.

What Bill said was shocking but she didn't seem to mind. He busily helped her unpack and stow and was vaguely wondering why Peter hadn't set about serving supper when he heard a woman's shrill voice on the deck above. Then Annana, dripping wet, came down the companion ladder. She rushed like mad into the cabin, crying, "Cap'n Bill! They kill Petuh!"

The wet torn muslin clung to her slender body. The long dark hair lay in lank strands about her shoulders. There was a little lump of something dangling

to a string about her neck. It showed on her breast under the wet muslin. She had a swollen eye as from a blow.

"Here, what the devil?" said Bill.

Annana clutched him. Her small dark face was strained with a wild look. "They tie Petuh's han's an' feet! They try make um tell where is treasuh islan'! I say all hell wrong they do that an' he hit me—" Her hand passed over the eye. "Madame beat me, too. They lock me in room. But I crawl out an' down vine an' run an' swim! Ol' Samson say he kill um he no tell! They kill me too they know I come tell you!"

Bill went out of the cabin and up the ladder on the bound.

Madge, with all the friendliness of a trader's daughter who had grown up among natives, took Annana into her room, stripped off her one piece dress, gave her a length of colored cloth.

Annana took the string from her neck and laid the wet cloth-wrapped lump on the wash stand. She dried her body and hair with a coarse towel, babbled, cursed Madame, now angry, now laughing. She put the colored cloth about her, tucking here, pulling there, and admired herself in the mirror—a part of Joblin's wedding gifts.

"Now I go on deck," said Annana, pleased as a peacock with new feathers, and ran out.

Madge had a ship-trained tidiness. In putting things straight she picked up the wet lump that Annana had worn about her neck. Madge could tell it contained trinkets, perhaps rings of brass and glass given by sailors. The string slipped off. As she looked at them, Madge seemed to freeze. Astonishment, with increase of horror, came upon her face as she bent to peer yet seemed to shrink. Her lips parted in an agonized gasp.

The room grew black and swirled. Her hands dropped, scattering the jewelry. She reached out for something to hold but fainted on her feet and fell heavily, striking an edge of the bed post. Blood oozed from her light brown hair, staining the new rug.

CHAPTER XIV

"Bring Him Gin."

IT WAS dinner hour on Madame Gruen's verandah. Two barefooted musicians in white trousers played a banjo and a guitar softly inside an unlighted doorway. The white of their trousers glimmered in the dimness. Madame, in shiny black satin and girdled until she could scarcely breathe, moved about with the stateliness of one too tightly corseted, and smirked at her guests. Tonight her heavy face had a strained preoccupied look; but business was business. She had a good thing in her hotel and the dinners were the best of it.

Captain Bill came out of the shadows with a jump and hit the verandah as if landed there by a high wind. He lurched forward, making for Madame. He bumped a dangling lantern with his head and set the whole string jiggling. He bumped against diners, men and women, sending food from poised forks to the floor, splashing wine out of glasses. Men arose and glowered, said things, but Bill didn't pause.

Madame was leaning over the shoulder of a fat old duffer. She became aware that some commotion was going on but she was so tightly braced that she could not turn until she had first straightened up. When she looked, her eyes popped. She staggered back, tripped on the satin train, clutched the duffer's shoulder, and screamed.

Captain Bill clapped a hand on her shoulder. "Where's Pete?"

Madame closed her eyes and swayed back as if about to faint. Bill pinched so hard she came to life with a squeal. The duffer struggled up, slightly tipsy and gallantly indignant. He said, "Take your dirty hands off—"

Bill with side-swipe of open hand sent the fellow in backward sprawl against the table behind where for a moment he lay waving hands and feet like a big bug on its back. His struggling sent dishes to the floor.

Men were up and coming, pressing angrily about Bill. He had his hand on the back of Madame's fat neck and faced her about with, "Lead the way!"

"Help!" Madame squalled.

"Let go o' her!" said a fellow and swung up a fist at Bill.

Bill let go all holds and hit the fellow and another one or two that tried to lay hands on him. Madame clutched at her long skirts and tried to run. Bill upended a table, made a jump, caught her by the hair and yanked. Her scream was just as if he held a knife at her throat.

This was more than the men there could stand. There was a rush at Bill. He kept one hand fast in Madame's pompadour until a fist or two struck his face. Then he let go and waded in. His voice boomed as he struck:

"You damned fools"—*crack!*—"her and that Samson"—*crack! crack!*—"are holdin' Pete pris'ner"—men had fallen back beyond reach of his fists as if ready to listen—"to make him tell where that damned fool treasure island of mine is! And," Bill concluded, "I'm going to get Pete out of here if I have to pile all you soft bellies in a heap and burn the house!"

That changed their feelings. Madame was tolerantly known as a loose and slightly thievish person. But Samson was definitely disliked. As Bill watched to see if anybody wanted some more trouble, Madame again gathered up her skirts and tried to run.

"There she goes!" some one called warningly.

Bill turned and caught her. The crowd pressed close behind. Madame puffed and sobbed, swore Peter had not been near the hotel, and fell to her knees and hands on the stairs, refusing to go up. Bill squeezed hard and Madame screamed, but stubbornly would not budge.

Bill braced himself, stooped, heaved. Madame squawked, kicked and clutched wildly as she felt herself rise shoulder-high into the air, balanced uncertainly as Bill marched up the stairs. The crowd swarmed up behind him.

In the hall, Bill set her down. "Where's Pete?"

She collapsed to the floor, moaned, would not say a word.

Bill turned to the nearest door, tried it. The door was locked. He stepped back, doubled his arm, bracing it against his side, then hit the door with his weight. There was a sound of splintering and the socket of the latch carried away. The door swung with sagging scrape on sprung hinges.

"Hey-O Pete!" Bill called into the darkness. No answer. "Anybody got a match?" said Bill, feeling his own pockets. Matches seemed offered from every hand. He struck one. The room was empty.

Bill stepped to the next door, hit it, and the door opened. Again he struck a match. The room was empty.

A voice called, "There is somebody in this room here!"

Before Bill could cross the hall, others had tried the door, found it unlocked.

A lamp was burning. Peter lay on the floor, a gag in his mouth, his hands tied behind him, his shirt torn off and his feet lashed up to the top of the foot post of the bed. By writhing bumps of his head on the floor he had made sounds to attract attention.

All about the floor were burnt matches. There were reddish blister patches on Peter's arms, neck, breast and belly. Sweat stood out on him as if he had been plashed with water.

Bill whipped out his sheath knife, cut the cord that held the wad of gag, cut

Peter's feet free, heaved him into a sitting posture, cut the lashing on his wrists.

Peter sagged weakly, mumbled, "Watch."

"Water hell!" said Bill. "Bring him gin!"

Shocked murmurs and sharp oaths hummed among the onlookers, pressing close in gape-mouthed horror. Some turned into the hallway to tell Madame what they thought of her, but she had gone.

Peter sat on the bed, pillowed up against the headboard, and after two or three swallows of gin he lost the wall-eyed look and rounded out curses on Samson, but not even his fury could keep the twinges of pain from his face.

"He done heah the commotion down staihs, go to the dooh, poke his haid out an' when he heah Bill's voice, he run! If eveh I git mah han's on him I'll . . ."

Peter said he had been about his business when Annana came running up to say that Madame wanted him to come to the hotel to get a farewell basket of whisky for the *Marigold*. Peter, anyhow, would have followed that faithless little heathen halfway around the world. He had been brought up to this room where Samson put a gun to his head and demanded to know where was the treasure island the *Marigold* was headed for. Peter laughed at him.

Then Madame tied his hands and feet. The two of them coaxed and threatened and got mad when Peter said there was no treasure. Samson hiked up Peter's feet, tore off his shirt, stuck a match against the bare flesh. Peter howled. Samson gagged him, burnt him severely with matches, loosened the gag to hear the truth; then, enraged, rammed the gag home and swore to blister the stubborn nigger from soles to forehead.

"If eveh I git mah han's on him—" Peter said it with wild gleam of eye, showing his teeth.

CHAPTER XV

Stolen Rings

WHEN Captain Bill got back to the schooner, before he was out of the boat, Harry called down that Madge had met with an accident.

Bill growled a lot of curses on such luck as all this and went below with a rush. Madge lay on the bed with eyes wide open in a fixed stare at a beam overhead.

Annana with woeful face stood by in puzzled anguish for Madge had said fiercely, "Don't touch me!" when the little native had tried to be tender.

After Bill came in, Madge sat up with hand to her aching head. Her look at Annana made Bill guess, "Did she hit you?" at which Annana broke into a howl of protest with flutter of hands.

"Then what the devil?" said Bill.

Madge pressed her lips, put both hands to her head, seemed dizzy, but steadied herself. "I want to talk to you alone, Bill."

"Outside!" Bill pushed Annana out of the door, shut the door. He asked, huskily gentle, "What's the matter?"

Madge put both hands to her eyes. Her body shook with repressed sobs. She took hold of Bill's hand, gripped it, and staring straight ahead said:

"That girl has my rings that were stolen when father was murdered!"

Bill said, "What?" and thought Madge a little out of her head.

"One," she went on in a low dull voice, "is my engagement ring. I had been afraid the diamond was loose and only that afternoon father had brought it home from the jeweler. I was away from home that night—"

She pressed her hands to her mouth but could not stop the sobbing.

Bill arose. He stood on one foot, then on the other, hazily trying to think.

"The man that killed my father must have given them to her. She has put

her arms about his neck, kissed him and I—I put my arms about her!"

"Who give 'em to her?"

"She said she found them. But lied. I could see she was lying."

"I'll damn soon learn!" Bill slammed back the door and pounced on Annana.

"Where'd you get them rings!" said Bill, shaking her. Annana, helpless as a doll in his grip, began to howl. "Shut up!" Bill ordered, shaking her again. "Where'd you get 'em?"

She said something barely articulate.

Bill said, "I'll wring your neck! Where'd you get 'em?" Then with a kind of gentle urgency, "Listen. I don't care where the hell you got 'em, but I want to know."

"I find um!" she wailed.

"Where?"

"You beat me 'f I tell you!"

"No, but I will if you don't!" He swayed up a fist big enough to smash in the head of a barrel, held it near her small face.

"He give um to Madame. She put um in box in drawer an' lock it. One time she sleep I fin' key an' take um!"

Captain Bill jerked her against his breast, gave her a hug, patted her face. "Good girl!"

"You no care I steal um?" asked the amazed Annana.

"You didn't steal 'em," said Bill. "You just brought 'em back where they belonged!"

She had no understanding of what he meant but his tone pleased. Bill dragged her into Madge's room:

"She stole 'em out of Madame's drawer—it was Samson had 'em! I'm off shore to catch that black muzzled dog and—"

CHAPTER XVI

"In Irons, Waiting to Be Hanged"

BILL went ashore and straight to Dr. Kelkey.

The Doctor's advice was, "Don't mention the rings to a soul. Best not to let it get about that Samson's wanted in connection with the murder. Would make him hide more desperately. What he did to Peter is enough."

"'Nough for me to break his damn neck," Bill growled.

"Madame probably doesn't know anything about the murder. Did likely know or guess the rings were stolen. Can't be worth much or that fellow wouldn't have given them to her. But I think it might be a good idea for us to go over to the hotel and have a look through that Samson's belongings. There may be something more . . ."

They went. Dr. Kelkey went on up to the room Samson used; but Bill, led by one of Madame's girls, found Madame biting her nails and moaning like a bruised animal in one of the sheds.

Bill asked questions. All he got by way of an answer were tears and howls.

Back at the hotel he found Dr. Kelkey fidgeting nervously and excitedly on the verandah and hiding under his coat a long black wallet.

"I found this between mattress and springs. Among other things in it, that note Joblin owes!"

"Then let's go right over to Joblin and make him pay!" Bill took a stride, on his way.

Dr. Kelkey clapped a restraining hand on Bill's shoulder. "No, no, Bill! Not so fast. Remember, it's that Samson we are after first. Joblin won't run away. Even if he does, fine! He'll leave enough property behind to cover what's due her. But if it gets about that the note's been found, Samson won't show his head. So we can't let out a word yet about this note or the rings."

"Doc, you've said all along them two had their heads together! Know what I bet? I bet you, Joblin ought to be hung, too. I bet you him and Samson are old friends, and bad ones! I bet you Joblin hadn't the money in hand to pay, so he put Samson up to killing Captain

Lewis and Samson was loafing around here to collect!"

"Either that," the Doctor agreed bitterly, "or Samson, being a business man, thought Joblin would rather pay him ten thousand than Madge twenty, and so came to the island to—"

"I bet you," Bill smashed fist to palm with a crack like the report of a gun, "that Joblin, being hard up for ready money, was trying to get hold of my treasure to—"

"Bill, I believe you're right!"

"I'm going to stay right here till we find that Samson then—"

"No, Bill. The best thing you can do is to get out, right away. It's only you that Samson is afraid of. As long as you are here he will stay in hiding. Go right on your trip. The consul will be back in a few days. He's a different man than old Warren. When you get back, maybe Samson and Joblin will be in irons, waiting to be hanged. Madge will get her money. The consul will see to that."

So Captain Bill was reluctantly persuaded and sailed at dawn.

For days afterwards the Doctor watched and queried for any trace of Mr. Sam Samson but not a thing was seen or heard of him.

CHAPTER XVII

Black Pierre Sails Up the Channel

TRADER JIM climbed on board ponderously and welcomed the *Marigold* with fat arms out in a vague embrace as he rumbled joyously. He was followed by the wrinkled, more agile Fijian Mary, who wore a faded but clean Mother Hubbard to show that she knew how ladies ought to dress.

"Yes'r," said Trader Jim, rumbling deep in his throat, "Old Wallowaggo is about due any day now. Hope it's soon. I'm runnin' short o' gin . . ."

There was a big feast ashore that night. Jim got placidly drunk. Annana curled on a pile of mats and slept when it grew late. Mary sang chants of her cannibal girlhood while Bill, crosslegged on the mats, drank gin, smoked, and Madge leaned against him.

Near midnight they made ready to return to the beach. Annana refused to awaken. Bill picked her up as if she were a baby and strode out in the moonlight with Madge hanging to his arm when the sand became deep. At the water's edge, Bill gave Annana over to Peter, who fondled her tenderly with an adoring look on his glossy black face.

The next morning in the dawn haze Bill roused up instantly from a shake on the arm. The half-breed mate said, "Ship she stand off."

"What kind of ship?"

"Don' know yet."

"Standing off? Then it ain't old Wallowaggo. The moon was good as the sun any day for him to run in by."

Captain Bill went on deck, climbed the deck house, looked away toward a three masted schooner that lay under shortened sail far outside the reefs. He stared for a time, swore a little, called for the glass and went aloft.

"Harry," he shouted down after a time, "if that ain't Joblin's *Maleuka* I'll quit the sea as a man ought who don't know a ship when he sees her!"

Harry swore softly.

About an hour later the schooner began to work her way into the harbor. Captain Bill went aloft again, peered long. He let out a whoop, jammed the telescope, and came down the rigging almost as if falling, swinging off and bouncing to the deck, with:

"That's Joblin's *Maleuka* all right and Black Perry's got her! What he'd doing away over here, only the devil knows. But get ashore, Harry. Tell Jim to look sharp. He'll understand. Perry has a way of taking what he wants from traders! But damn me, if I didn't have girls aboard I'd be half glad to see him!"

Harry came back from shore with word that Trader Jim was too drunk to rouse, just blinked and grunted and dozed off again. Mary had grinned, patted the shotgun Jim used on pigeons, said, "Debil himself he come try steal, me shoot um!"

The *Maleuka* had come through the narrow channel. The leadsman could be seen making his casts as the schooner felt her way in. Very faintly his long-drawn calls were heard across the water. The schooner shot up into the wind, the sails were hauled down, the anchor fell with zipping click of cable-links.

What Bill said could be heard the half mile away: Black Pierre had come to anchor almost in the mouth of the channel, being very strategically placed to keep Bill from going out.

At once the natives began to shove off the beach in outriggers to greet the new ship, hoping for small gifts or a chance to steal something. At once, too, a boat was lowered from the *Maleuka* and Pierre got into it.

"Dressed up like he was going to his own weddin'," said Bill, amused and scornful.

As the boat drew near, Black Pierre called pleasantly, making a flourish, "Heigh-o, my friend! I come for a visit!"

"Why not go to hell—where you'll be welcome!" said Bill, grinning.

Black Pierre raised his hat to the two girls watching from the rail in staring curiosity. Black Pierre was a famous man.

"You're coming on board alone," said Bill, not liking the faces of the men in the boat.

"You have fear of *me*?" Pierre sounded amazed.

"Yes, that some day I'll have to waste good canvas to give you a proper burial!" Then, loud enough to be overheard: "Stand by with an eye peeled. If another boat from that schooner heads this way, sink this one!"

Pierre laughed. His hand moved in reassuring gestures. He came up the ladder and on board, quite at ease and pleasant.

Pierre was not a large but was a handsome man, with flashing eyes and a smile too that flashed. He had the trick of fascinating women, almost at a glance. Somehow, even after he discarded them, women remembered him with affection.

He called Madge by name, using *mademoiselle,* and held his hat to his breast as he bowed low, keeping his eyes on her face. He bowed quite as low to the dazzled Annana.

Bill demanded, "Why the hell did you anchor there in the channel?"

Pierre's look was apologetically innocent. "Channel? I did not know. It was a proper depth. I thought it best to be safe."

"You," said Bill with no particular emphasis, "are a liar. The *Marigold* draws nearly as much water as the *Maleuka*." Bill pointed aloft. "See that gaff? If you think you are going to stop me from going out when I'm ready, try it! I'll hang you up there to dry!"

Pierre laughed, patted Bill's shoulder. "Let us go into the cabin where we can talk alone."

In the cabin Bill broke out whisky, straddled a chair, put his arms across the back, cocked his head, ready to listen.

Pierre waggled a hand. "What of the great treasure, my friend?"

"You, too, hm? Stole the *Maleuka* and swept the beach for a crew! I hope you get hung."

Pierre spoke with great humor. "They come to me and say, 'Bill Jones has found a million in Spanish gold!' I say, 'Good. I am glad my friend has had much luck!' "

"Who come?"

"The Joblin and his friend that Monsieur Douglas."

"Who's Douglas?"

"A tall man with a pale face. He is a bad one. I can tell you that!"

Bill chuckled. "And how the hell did

you know but what I had treasure?"

Black Pierre shrugged a shoulder, amused. "I am not fool enough to think you one, my friend. If you knew of treasure, you would tell of it, eh? If you had treasure, you would not spend much, eh? Pah! But I listened with mouth open, so!"

Bill clapped his doubloon to the table, told his story. Pierre laughed and fingered the coin. "You play one damn good trick, my friend!"

"Not so bad yourself, Perry. You got the *Maleuka* to chase me in! Is Joblin on board?"

Pierre put his hand to his heart. "I swore on my honor to say that he is not!"

"How the devil and all did you know where to look for me?"

Pierre shrugged a shoulder. "The Joblin say, 'Go to Quica.' The Joblin say, 'He will be there.' And so you are."

Bill eyed him, grinned, shook his head. "Nope!"

"No-up what, if you please?"

"I don't know what you're up to, Perry. But I'm not going to agree. You and Joblin can fight it out!"

"They mean to attack you, my friend. Seize your ship. Make you tell of treasure! My good friend, though you had not one dollar of treasure, still the Joblin would give his soul for your life!"

"Why? 'Cause I bilked him out of stores and trade?"

Bill explained, and Pierre laughed appreciatively, drank to him; then shrugged his shoulder. "It may be that. But the hate of the Joblin for you seems to me more than the loss of a little trade and some stores. I give you warning. They are a bad lot on that ship." Pierre added with emphasis. "Monsieur Douglas swears on his soul that he had seen the treasure!"

"But didn't fool you?"

"Pah! I know my friend Captain Bill too well to believe he would come to this island with kegs of gold. He would go to San Francisco or Sydney first. Drink much, have pretty women about him, live, ah gloriously!"

Bill eyed him slant-wise. "How it come they let you come like this and tell me what's up?"

"Many reasons. For one, I say, 'I will go and demand that he divide the treasure with us!' "

Bill flipped the doubloon. "Take it all."

"No. They do not care if you keep me here. They do not care if you kill *me*. They have caught you in a harbor and you cannot get out. They have a bigger crew and can capture your ship. They mean to give whisky and promises to the savages ashore to join in the attack. My friend, you and I, too, are in what you call the pickle!"

Bill agreed doubtfully; adding, "But I wouldn't trust you, Perry—not even to sink with an anchor about your neck! You may be up to tricks."

Pierre leaned forward, put a coaxing hand on Bill's. "Help me to capture the *Maleuka*. Then you will have no more trouble over this treasure thing and I will have a good schooner!"

"Help you to capture the ship where you're captain?"

"I am not captain. The men are engaged by the man Douglas. They are treasure mad. I am but navigator!" he said bitterly. Then, spreading his arms, displaying the silk shirt, and with a mincing air, "But I dress for the ladies!"

"How do they account for them?"

"The pretty native girl is with you because she feared to remain at Tapillo. Mademoiselle Lewis, because of your treasure, made you fall in love with her! But to—"

Bill snorted. "I always thought I wasn't smart, but of all the fools!"

"But too, the Joblin curses her and the Monsieur Douglas says he will cut your throat with his own hand!"

"Why don't you tell him how hard it is to do? You've tried it, Perry!"

Pierre smiled, shrugged his shoulder.

"I have made mistakes. And you," Pierre looked at Bill's knuckles, "have hit this poor head as if with a club. One learns!"

"Right. I've allus half way liked you, Perry. But I wouldn't trust you. No, not—"

At that moment there was much shouting on deck. Bill listened with head cocked for a moment, then jumped up and went bounding.

The men in the boat alongside had grown weary and suspicious in waiting. They demanded Captain Pierre. Bill looked them over. Bad lot indeed, if these were a sample of the others. Sullen gleaming eyes and wolf-hunger look in their faces.

"If you're tired of waiting, shove off!" said Bill.

A wry-mouthed fellow bawled. "An' if we do, we'll be back, you—" He called Bill names and the next moment almost fell out of the boat as a thrown belaying pin from Peter's hand struck him on the head.

The wry-mouthed one drew a concealed revolver but his companions in the boat seized his arm and protested urgently as Bill's boys eagerly leaned over the bulwark with rifles pointing down.

It took some little time before Bill could get his boys quieted enough to feel safe in leaving them again. They were itching for a fight.

In returning to the companion way, Bill glanced through the skylight. Annana had been on deck just now, yet there she was in the cabin with little face beaming at Black Pierre.

As he returned to the cabin, Bill saw a glimpse of cloth vanish into a stateroom. Pierre, quite as if he had been waiting in patience, sipped whisky.

"You don't lose no time, do you?" said Bill. "If Peter had caught you, he'd broke her neck—or yours! Go back and tell Joblin whatever the hell you want. Be truthful for you to tell him to stay away from the *Marigold* if he don't want to bring up in hell. You, too, Perry."

Pierre gestured, unangered. He put out his hand. "My friend, I speak honest when I say we are both in the pickle. That crew is treasure mad or pah! two words and I would have them behind me to seize the ship."

Bill grinned, shaking hands. "Damn your old soul. I like you better'n any other man I don't like. But mind now, that won't keep me from breaking your neck if—well, you know what I mean."

CHAPTER XVIII

Rifles Bark on the Maleuka

BLACK PIERRE had no sooner returned to the *Maleuka* than there was much hurrying about on her deck. Men piled into the boat and struck out ashore, passing at an angle to give the *Marigold* a wide berth.

Through the glass, Bill could make out that Pierre was not among the eleven men, but he guessed that one gaunt bowed form with floppy panama, as if trying to conceal his face, was Joblin. The boat was heavily armed.

"Going ashore," Bill guessed, "to stir up the niggers to help attack me. And to give Jim a bad time of it. Nothing will make them madder than to be told there ain't no treasure."

Bill went to the mast head with the glass under his arm. In a moment there were puffs of smoke from the *Maleuka's* lee rail, a splatter about the *Marigold* as if pebbles had been thrown, then the crack of distant guns. The range was far too far for much danger from such marksmen.

Boys of Bill's crew jerked up their rifles and began to fire. Bill shouted down at them, "Aw stop it! You couldn't hit the moon that far off!"

Eleven men had gone shoreward. There seemed as many still on board

the *Maleuka,* and Black Pierre was not in sight. Bill frowned, thinking what would happen if the *Maleuka* hauled up her anchor and came alongside the *Marigold.*

He stared away shoreward, but there was nothing to be seen. Jim's house was behind the bush. But presently there seemed to be great excitement over in the village, much yelling; and as he stared, listening, Bill heard the crackle of fire in dry thatch and saw a swirl of smoke fringed with up-flung swirling flames. Trader Jim's hut and shed were burning.

Madge called, "What are they doing?"

Bill's hard knotted face looked pretty solemn. "My guess is they are punishing Jim for saying there is no treasure. Things are in a tangle. Channel's blocked. They've killed Jim and Mary —"

"Oh, how can you say that?" Madge cried.

"I know Mary. She was nursing a shotgun. She'd use it before she would let anybody burn Jim's house. If she used it, they'd kill her."

Natives were appearing between the beach and scrub. They were riotous and gleeful, with loot in their hands. Joblin's men had let the savages loot Jim's store before setting it on fire.

"Making friends with 'em so they'll attack us," said Bill to himself. "Perry warned me. Maybe I ought to have trusted him—a little. I wish to God I'd never spoke of treasure." He looked all about, lifted his eyes, sniffed, nodded. "Going to rain."

The *Maleuka's* boat was leaving the shore. Through the glass Bill counted noses. "Only ten coming back. I guessed right. Old Mary used her shotgun."

He dropped to the deck and a bullet struck near his feet. A sharpshooter was high in the *Maleuka's* rigging. "You keep on and I'll come over there and yank you out by the hair," said Bill.

Madge came up to him. "Bill, I think Annana is so frightened she's sick. She just sits in the cabin, looking strange."

"And if she'll just stay there till this hurrah is over, I'll give her a nice new strip of calico for a petticoat."

"But I have never seen her so moody."

Bill pointed to the mark made by the bullet. "You go below and keep out of sight—I'll give you some calico, too."

Madge took his arm, standing with her body between him and the *Maleuka.* He roughly swung her about, brought her up on the other side of him. "You got tender skin. My old hide—bullets that far off wouldn't make a puncture!"

Somebody in the *Maleuka's* boat had taken off a shirt and tied the two arms to an oar. It was not a white shirt and was now being waved aloft like a signal of distress, but was meant as a flag of truce while the boat headed for the *Marigold.*

They rowed cautiously and from afar called to know if he would respect a flag of truce. Bill jeered, "Come right up alongside!"

Bill tried to study the faces. The distance was too great for details. But he could see that one man was conspicuously pale faced, like a white blotch among the deep tan of other faces.

"All right, Joblin!" Bill called. "Speak up! I can't see you, but I can smell you —like a month old beached whale!"

At that Joblin came more clearly into view from behind a man's shoulder, uptilted the floppy brim, slowly stood up. "Captain Jones!" he called in a formal tone.

Bill swore at him, not in anger. "Why you squawking 'Captain Jones' like you didn't know if it was me?"

"Captain Jones, if you surrender, you will not be harmed!"

"Surrender!" Bill bawled, indignant. "Surrender! Why don't you ask me to jump overboard or—"

"Captain Jones, I give you my word of honor that—"

"Yes," Bill jeered, "you give your word

of honor that you'd paid Captain Lewis, too, didn't you? You're an awful damn fool, Joblin! Surrender? *Me!* I believe you know there ain't no treasure and—"

Howls went up at that. Men shouted at Bill that he was a fool to think they could be put off with a denial.

"All right. Just come aboard anytime you like and try to find it!" Bill invited ominously.

They rowed off, shouting curses and threats.

CHAPTER XIX

Overboard in the Storm

IT BEGAN to rain. Lightning flashed far off with jigsaw crackle and thunder rumbled. That night Bill posted lookouts forward and aft, but kept the deck himself, sent everybody else to bed. He moved about tirelessly.

The splashing patter of the rain and gush from the scuppers made it hard to be sure of sounds. Now and then a gust of wind rattled blocks.

He knew the savages from off shore wouldn't attack at night, especially in the rain; but he wasn't so sure about the *Maleuka's* men.

Some time before midnight Bill saw, or thought he did, an indistinguishable smudge of blackness move swiftly across the deck. He, knowing the half-breed's way of quietly being up and about at all hours, called, "Harry?"

No answer. Bill thought that maybe his strained imagination was up to tricks. Then he heard a splash at the schooner's side. It was vague, dimmed by the scupper's gush. It might have been a big fish that broke water. Nevertheless, it was a splash. He peered from the side down into the blackness and saw nothing.

Bill reasoned that he might have been mistaken in thinking he saw a figure move in the darkness across the deck. But there was no mistake about that splash. He went aft. The boy there was wide awake with a short clay pipe upside down in his mouth. He had heard nothing. Bill went forward. The boy there had heard nothing.

Captain Bill went below where the crew slept. He counted noses. None was missing. He went to the galley. Peter was snoring with gentle sizzles.

Bill hesitated but decided he would make dead sure. He went below and knocked lightly on Annana's door. Madge called to know what was wrong.

"Nothing. Go back to sleep."

He opened the door quietly, spoke. He fumbled for a match but his pockets were wet. The match wouldn't light. He reached out cautiously, hoping he wouldn't scare the sleeping girl; but when you count noses on ship board, you must count everybody's nose. He touched the bunk, ran his hand across it, up and down. The bunk was empty.

Captain Bill slowly felt his way through the darkness and to the deck. He walked to where he had heard the splash and peered over in the rain at the dark water. There was nothing to do. If the little fool had drowned herself, why? Could she, he wondered, have been a bigger fool and swum off to the *Maleuka?* Pierre had a way with women and Annana was utterly senseless.

About three o'clock he went to the galley and shook Peter. The glossy black yawned, grumbled goodnaturedly and peered out, listening to the rain. Then he lit a lantern and shook up the fire.

When the coffee was made Bill took a pannikin, sipped, said, "Annana bolted over the side last night."

Peter dropped the pan he held. It struck the stove with a bang, rolled, fell clattering to the deck. He looked at Captain Bill with a lidless sort of stare. He peered passed Bill into the black rain, mumbled hoarsely, "Yuh mean—*gone?*"

"Gone."

"B-but why?"

"God knows. Or the devil better."

"She drown herself?"

"Or swum over there."

Peter sat down. He was as limp as if he had been hit over the head. He listlessly rubbed the back of his hand over his forehead. The hand came away moist with cold sweat.

CHAPTER XX

Black Pierre

ABOUT mid-morning, Bill saw a boat heading through the rain for the *Marigold*. He jumped aloft and gave a searching stare all about. Only one boat was in sight. The rain was so heavy that at times the *Maleuka* was blotted out and other boats might have left her without being seen. There were five men in the boat and it came directly.

"More gam," said Bill, disgusted.

A far hail uneasily came from the boat. "Ahoy, *Marigold!*"

"What you want?"

"We're coming with a message!"

"That native girl on your ship?"

"It's about her. I've got a letter for you!" the fellow cried.

"I sure as hell now will break Perry's neck for that," said Bill to himself.

Peter was bareheaded and naked to the waist. He stood with arms folded, motionless. Bill with slant-cast glances kept him in the corner of his eyes. He knew something of the savagery under that glossy black hide. Be like Peter to jump feet-first right into that boat.

The boat drew close. A man near the bow put down his oar and took up a boat hook. It was the same Wry-Mouth that had come with Pierre. He said, "Get over the side here, some one o' you. I'll hand up the letter."

The man in the stern sheets said, "It might drop and be lost. I'll take it up on deck."

"Like hell you're going on that ship!" said Wry-Mouth.

"I am going to—"

Wry-Mouth blasted him with oaths and gave a shove with the boat hook, sending the boat's head off. "Give way! He's tryin' to desert!"

The man in the stern threw up his head in an appealing look toward the *Marigold* then, wrapped as he was in oilskins, flung himself into the water. Wry-Mouth snatched up an oar and struck at him.

A hasty shot banged over the *Marigold's* rail. It was meant to kill but missed. Bill stopped farther shots with unangered blow on the boy's wrist. Then he snatched a coil of rope and flung it down to the cumbered swimmer.

The boat made off, slackening its haste when no more shots were fired. Wry-Mouth wanting his words heard, drew in his oar, cupped his hands, shouted through the drive of rain: "He thinks he'll git a big whack from you by fightin' us! We'll show him an' you, you . . ."

The sea ladder was pitched over and went rattling down the side. The man crawled up, hung weakly at the top of the bulwark, looked across.

His hat was gone. Water gushed from his clothes. He was a fellow between twenty-five and thirty, broad of build, not handsome. His mouth was open in hard breathing. He looked longest at Madge.

Bill said, "What you up to?"

"I won't go back to those devils!" Again, with staring, his eyes lingered on Madge. To Bill, "That letter"—he opened his oilskin, patted a pocket—"must be mush. But I know what's in it." Carefully, but tearing the soggy paper, he drew out a folded sheet.

"Who sent it?" asked Bill.

The fellow hesitated. "Signed Pierre." He held the wet paper flat on his palm. His eyes lifted straight at Madge. Then to Bill, "Can I see you alone?"

"What about Annana?"

"The little native? This note here

says she will be returned if you send a keg of doubloons."

"Signed by Black Perry?"

The man nodded.

"And if I don't send 'em?"

"Please, Captain Jones. I must see you alone!"

"Something wrong," said Bill. "Perry never wrote a fool threat like that!"

"He didn't write it," said the man. "But alone, please."

Bill led the way forward, stopped at the galley door, gestured. The man went in. "Who wrote it if not Perry? He knows I've got no keg of doubloons and—"

"Black Pierre is dead—"

"Dead?"

"He was killed last night over that native girl. That man—devil, I mean!—Douglas wrote this. Signed Pierre's name. Some have grown doubtful about treasure. That trader ashore yesterday—he was pretty drunk, but denied—"

"They killed him, too?"

"His native wife shot a man point-blank, so they—"

"Good girl," said Bill. "But what are you up to?"

"Captain Jones." The man looked up with straight eye. "I've done most of the things the devil likes having done. I'm not begging off. I signed up with Douglas, knowing we were to come here to fight you for treasure. But by God, sir, if he hadn't sent me when I volunteered to come with the letter, I'd have swum off to you tonight just to get away from those devils. And I hope to God you haven't treasure. They're going to board you. I hope they don't find it."

Captain Bill frowned, listening tensely.

"That little native girl came alongside last night and—"

"She's swum off to more than one ship, that little devil!"

"—called for 'Cap Perry.' They got her on board. She was frightened at once and tried to get away. She called your name and one Peter."

Captain Bill glanced aside. Peter, with arms folded across his naked breast, stood in the rain at the other galley door.

"They took her down to Douglas. The instant she saw him she screamed. Pierre rushed out of his room. Unarmed. There was a fight. Douglas shot him. Then—God! There had been some drinking, but—the worst! That was it!"

"What of Joblin?" Bill growled.

The man cursed. "He kept beating her and asking something about a paper. Treasure map the men thought. This morning they threw her body overboard, links of chain to her feet."

At that Peter's voice broke into a vague roar. His eyes gleamed with madness. The man gave a jump and brought up against the bulkhead with a jar.

"Go on," said Bill, sternly.

"But as a kind of test to see whether or not you did have treasure, this note! Though I heard Joblin say that if he knew there wasn't a gold piece on board he'd spend every dollar he had in the world to hunt you down."

Bill growled, "Keep talking!"

"They say the other girl will be next! That's why I'm here."

Captain Bill picked up an empty sauce pan, replaced it, all with the abstracted look of scarcely knowing what he was doing. "Your name?"

"Cullen."

"Who the hell is Douglas?"

"Don't know, sir. Somebody that's in with Joblin on this treasure thing. He's not a sailor. But he is a devil!"

Bill looked at his knuckles, rubbed his palm together, took a long breath, gazed fixedly at Cullen for a time, then turned and stared into the rain. "Who said the other girl will be next?"

"Douglas. Joblin. Both of them. They passed out drink and—well—I'd like to blow them all to hell!"

Captain Bill stared at him, weighed him, then looked away seaward again: "By this time tomorrow there'll be no damn *Maleuka*—or, well, no *Marigold!*"

He sent Harry for whisky and dry clothes, gave Cullen a half pint by way of a drink. While Cullen was changing his clothes in the galley, Bill went aft and lied brazenly to Madge, saying Annana was being held for ransom; and that something would be worked out.

Then he took the doubloon from his pocket, drew back his arm and sent it flying as far as he could throw.

Later Bill had Cullen give more details about Black Pierre.

"Perry had faults," said Bill soberly. "He'd steal your nose right off your face. Then he'd purt-near make you believe your face looked better thataway."

"He did as brave a thing as a man could," said Cullen.

"Never much of a hand to be a coward, Perry wasn't. And a hard one to kill. I've tried! Wasn't they *nobody* to take his part? And the girl's?"

Bill's tone and look had some very direct reproach for Cullen himself. And Cullen dropped his eyes, moved his feet:

"The men didn't like him. He had a way of eying them that was like contempt. When he spoke his words were biting. He kept to himself. To his room." Cullen lifted his eyes. "I'm not begging off. But it all happened so quick! When they took the girl below I stayed on deck. At the skylight. She was struggling and screaming. Pierre came out of his room. I could hear his voice but not what he said. He was furious. Then he seemed to fly, just as if thrown, at Douglas! Barehanded, too! He got one hand on Douglas' throat and Douglas shot him, shot again just as Pierre fell."

Bill muttered, "Good lad, Perry!"

"I couldn't look. I felt sick at my stomach. I walked to the rail, leaned over. Some men came up, dragging the body. They were a little drunk and excited. And in a hurry. They dropped the body on the deck and tumbled back below as if afraid they'd miss something. It was raining. I went over to the body. It was too dark to see where he had been shot. I thought it somehow not right to leave a dead man out in the rain. Not a man that had died like he did. But what could I do? There was a big racket going on below. Laughter and shouts. I went back to the skylight and cursed them. They saw my face and fellows came up and half dragged me below. Said I oughtn't miss the fun! Whisky was being passed. I needed it. I got a little drunk, quick. When I came on deck other men were staggering about. The body was gone. Somebody I guess had heaved it overboard."

Bill said, "Damn their souls!"

Cullen spoke solemnly. "All I want now is a chance to wipe out last night. Barehanded he went at that Douglas. And I—damn my soul, I funked it!"

CHAPTER XXI

Captain Bill Makes Ready for Battle

THE rain held. From time to time Bill eyed the sky. He moved about broodingly. Now and then he said to himself, "Treasure map, eh?" and mulled suspicions. No doubt of it now—to his way of thinking—Joblin had known Samson had the note; now knew it had been taken from between mattress and springs; thought it was Bill himself who had laid hold on it. "Spend every dollar he owns, eh?"

Late that afternoon he took Madge aside. "See here. I lied like hell. Cullen's tale about Annana is . . ."

She shrank with hands to her cheeks. Hard hit and stunned, she stared at Captain Bill. Her eyes asked why had he told her so brutally such a tale.

And he said, "Just at dawn I'm going over there. They are two to one which ain't much if the devil don't help—and he won't, not the like of them! It's a lot safer to take every man I've got to make surer of sweeping their deck than to leave some men here with you who

couldn't stand 'em off if we don't come back. And I've told you plain what happened to her over there so, if we don't come back, you'll know what to do with the gun I'm leaving with you!"

"Oh! That men, *white* men, could—"

"When I find color makes much difference, I'll carry a locker of the right sort of paint and daub it on 'em."

"You are leaving me here, alone, Captain Bill?"

"I am. There'll be hell ablaze. Take you along, we'd have to think about you. Leave men here, they'd be useless. One way or another, we won't be gone long. How about it?"

Madge looked straight at him: "Why of course, Captain Bill."

"You ain't afraid?"

"'Afraid?'" She glanced aside. "No, Captain Bill, not *afraid*. I am uneasy. I am anxious. I am *not* afraid!"

He put an arm about her, hugged her close, kissed her. "You won't ever tell Mac I done this?" said Captain Bill with banter-tone, just as if the *Maleuka* were a thousand miles away.

"As long as he lives, Mac will see me do this every time I meet you!"

She threw her arms up about his neck, pressed her lips to his hard brown face.

That night in the rain the long boat was hoisted from its chocks on the forward deckhouse and swung overboard. The rain-swollen ropes worked stiff and the blocks were greased so there would be no squeaking.

Bill got some oakum, put some bolts in wads of the stuff to give it weight in case it had to be thrown, poured on oil, bound the oakum loosely with rope strands, then wrapped the fireballs in oilskins. He put dry matches, into a dry tin and wrapped the tin with a piece of oilskin. He took the oars, parceled and served them so they would work noiselessly.

During the night from time to time, Bill passed by the skylight and had a look below. Madge, by the hour, sat there with head bowed against her hand, very much as if praying. Perhaps she was. But when it was time to leave, Madge came on deck and there wasn't a word or a look out of her that seemed asking him not to go. She told him goodbye with effort at cheeriness.

CHAPTER XXII

"Out Cutlasses and Board"

THE boat shoved off in the rainy darkness. The half-breed steered. For all of anything that could be seen ahead they might as well have closed their eyes. There would be no lights showing on the *Maleuka*.

Captain Bill had planned to be somewhere close to the *Maleuka* when the first vague light came oozing through the clouds. He wanted to board her in the dawn so his men could see what they were about in fighting over her deck.

Bill was up in the bow. He peered ahead. Rain splashed into his face, flooded his half naked body.

From time to time he turned his face in the darkness, looking behind him toward where the *Marigold* lay.

Harry muttered something. The rowers stopped pulling and began dipping their blades lightly, just enough to keep head-on to the drive of rain. He, no longer feeling sure of distance and position, was standing by. The splatter of the rain into salt water had a persistent sibilant hiss as if urging silence.

The darkness began to change, to grow muddily gray. Dawn was coming. It would come quickly. Bill hunched forward, straining his eyes for a look ahead. Everything depended on getting near *enough to board before the Maleuka* could be aroused and man the rail with rifles.

Dead ahead, not three hundred feet beyond, a dim solid ship-shaped blot began to appear out of the rain-drenched

dawn. The half-breed had steered accurately through darkness dense as the inside of a barrel.

Bill kept his voice down, "Put her alongside under the foremast chains!"

Harry spoke. The rowers heaved forward, dipped the oar blades, swayed back. The long oars bent as if to snap.

The light, like lamplight brightened by the turn of a wick's screw, grew stronger. Fog-like shadows passed, disclosing masts and rigging.

Bill stood on the bow sheet, balanced as if he had a backstay in his hand, swaying easily with every lurch of the stroke. He saw a figure in oilskins slowly climbing in the forward deckhouse.

The man's mouth was stretched wide in a yawn and a forearm was rising to cover his mouth with the back of his hand when his glance fell on the boat. He yelled, flung up his arms, jumped into the air, yelled again.

One, then another, then other bareheaded men, popped up from behind the high bulwark, their faces smeared with a daze of surprise. The boat was less than two hundred feet away. Except for the frantic shouting and clatter on deck, they could have heard the coughing grunt of the oarsmen.

Bill, standing like a figurehead at the bow, loosened the flap of his revolver holster and took a cutlass into his left hand. There was the mingling of a snarl and a grin on his face, like the look of a man eager for rough work and he sang out, "That's the lads! Break your damn backs on those oars!"

Joblin's scrawny head appeared away aft. A man with a revolver poked far out at arm's length was beside him in a waggle of uncertain aim. "Shoot!" Joblin screamed. "Shoot 'im!" The man fired rapidly.

A bullet aimed at Bill passed by and struck into the back of a young native on a thwart beside Peter. The boy let go of the oar and lurched backwards, dead. The oar staggered in Peter's grip, then heaved to the powerful negro's stroke, catching the rhythmic surge of the oarsmen. Other shots were fired and things, anything at hand, hastily thrown.

"Treasure!" Bill bawled with a whoop of jeering; then, not in the least aware of what he was saying, echoed his old man-of-warsman father's belief in cold steel with a shout of "Out cutlasses and board!"

Oars were dropped or tossed in hasty confusion as men grabbed for the guns beside them and shifted to face up at the *Maleuka's* lofty bulwarks. Peter picked up a meat cleaver from between his feet. A native, over eager, jumped up and fired both barrels of the shotgun. The shot blew a jagged seive-like pattern into the side of the schooner and the kick of the gun tumbled the boy overboard.

The boat crashed bow-on against the *Maleuka* with a jar that sent many men off their balance, but Bill had jumped with clutching leap for the chains. He held on to the shrouds, thrust with cutlass point at men's faces. The squat half-breed, still sitting on the stern sheets, aimed overhead with his repeating rifle. Peter sprang to the chains, meat cleaver a-swing in his hand. A gun muzzle touched his breast, was knocked aside as it fired, and the cleaver fell on the head of the man that had pointed it.

Bill was over the side, driving and hacking men before him. It was cut and slash at faces, heads or backs, and to hell with anybody the reddened blade could reach. Peter charged at men with leveled guns. His cleaver was a battle axe in a madman's hand.

Rain splattered blood and ran red with foam into the scuppers.

Among the men that appeared aft was a tall pale faced fellow, black haired, bare headed. He screamed like an animal. Cullen yelled, "That's him!" and went sprawling. He, wearing shoes, had slipped on the wet deck. Cullen, belly down and a leg in the scupper way, fired

his rifle. Smoke, sheltered by the bulwark, puffed out and lingered before his eyes. When he sprang up the white face was gone.

The boy that had been knocked overboard by the kick of the shotgun had kept hold of the gun. He climbed back into the boat, from there on deck. A bag of shells dangled from a canvas strap across his naked shoulder. He bounced into the rigging, squirmed with twist of legs to make himself fast and began to shoot. He always pulled both barrels at once and the shock of the kick made him dangle like a spider on a web.

A fellow dropped to his knees and threw up both hands before Bill. Bill turned the edge of the falling cutlass. "You cowardly—" There was the shadowy sweep of a long arm falling: Peter struck with his cleaver. Whether men were on their knees or on their bellies he, that day, killed them if he could. The man, half-beheaded, sank forward. It was Wry-Mouth who had threatened so loudly. Peter leaped on, cleaver a-swing at men with rifles.

Bill flung his emptied revolver ahead of him at a man's face, jumped with cutlass thrust at the man and was struck over the head with the barrel of a rifle. Bill staggered sidewise. A gun blazed in his face. The flash was blinding. He couldn't see clearly but plunged forward with blind sweep and thrust, felt the blade bite and gave it his weight. It was hand to hand work. A ponderous fellow gripped Bill's arm, bearing down. He yelled for others to wrench the cutlass loose. Bill let himself go with the man, both falling; and put all of his weight into a bent knee, full on the ponderous man's belly. The grunt of pain was loud as a roar.

Men fell on Bill's back, on his neck, struck with gun butts, slashed with knives, tried to get a gun's muzzle against him and shoot without killing one of their own men. Bill hit with fists, elbows, knees. The jerk of his cutlass sliced to bone the fingers that tried to wrench it loose. He fought like a boar among dogs, shaking, tossing, knocking men about until his right arm was free. Then he struck with the cutlass edge as if using a whip.

Bill lifted the shout of, "Below, you! Get below! Clear the deck!"

It was an order but had the sound of a promise as if below their lives would be spared. Again and again and again the double-barrelled shotgun exploded at them from the rigging. There was a panic surge for the ladder.

The *Maleuka* still outnumbered the boarders, but had been outfought. Nearly half the *Marigold's* crew were dead or badly wounded, but they held the deck. Fleeing men had stumbled at the companion coaming, fell, piled up at the foot of the ladder, and were crowding into the cabin.

The boy came down out of the rigging with his shotgun. Before anyone knew what he was up to, he wrenched away the skylight grating, broke in the heavy glass with butt-blows, thrust his gun through and pulled both triggers. A cloud of smoke boiled down into the cabin. Wild howls came up, and cries, begging.

Bill knocked the boy back, swearing. "Damn you, I need 'em!" He raised his voice, wanting his men, now mad to kill, to hear: "Half our mates are gone. All you are hurt, some bad! So who the hell's to tow us to sea past this hulk if not these devils!"

CHAPTER XXIII

Out of the Flames

HARRY and Cullen went down into the forepeak with an ax, Bill's tin of matches and the fireballs.

Bill quickly overhauled his boys. Three were dead, and the one shot in the boat just before boarding made four. Two others were so badly hurt they had no

chance. Only the fool native with the shotgun was without a scratch.

Peter, badly cut up, stood guard at the companion way with the cleaver in one hand, Bill's revolver, recovered and reloaded, in the other.

The half-breed Harry came up out of the forepeak in a flurry of haste. His yell was like the cry of a man who flees from a ghost, and he blurted a babble of oats with Pierre's name among them.

"Perry!" said Bill.

"Him down there!"

"Alive?"

"He cuss like hell an' want to fight even if can't stan' up!"

"Well, get him up an' be careful of him. Here you, and you"—Bill shoved this black and that—"go bear a hand!"

Then Bill went straight to where Peter stood guard at the companion, cleaver in hand. "Now see here, Pete. Don't you be takin' out any grudge on old Perry. You hear me?"

Peter turned with glowering sullen "Yessuh" that wasn't convincing.

"'Tain't his fault," Bill explained, "that women love 'im—no moren'n it's mine they don't me when I'm so willing!'

"But he done coaxed 'er to—"

"I've coaxed girls too. So've you. He fought for her good as me or you'd have done! Some day I may kill 'im myself, but it'll never be over mistreatin' a woman. He just don't, ever!"

Pierre was carried along the deck. He couldn't stand but he held his head up and rain washed his face. There was a mad fever glow in his sunken black eyes, and his tanned face was pinched. Dried blood was all over his clothes.

Bill strode to him. "Damn me if for onct I ain't glad to see you!"

Pierre's eyes wavered. He seemed not to know Captain Bill who, half-naked, was also blood-smeared, powder-smoked, with red hair in as wild a tousle as a Fijian's; but Pierre knew that voice. He looked about the deck, then again stared at Bill and spoke weakly:

"You? It is that you kill thees men?"

"Well, some," Bill agreed. "An' I ought've knowed you wouldn't be so easy killed! They dumped you on deck. The rain brought you to. You crawled for'ard an' fell down the forepeak, eh?"

Pierre moved his hands in fierce trembling gestures and his face looked like a devil's. "I mean to burn thees ship an' die in the fire to roast thees men!"

"Some ways you allus was all right, Perry," said Bill with vast approval. To the blacks, "Get him into the boat with our boys."

Harry and Cullen had returned to the forepeak, and soon reappeared.

In a moment smoke boiled up after them. Bill went to the broken skylight: "Below, there! I've fired the schooner! You that want to leave her, get on deck quick! You that don't, stay and roast!"

He glanced at men cutting into the deck to break through and give more draft to the fire. He strained his eyes in the rain to see the shore, afraid the savages might have come to the beach and, paddling out, guess that the *Marigold* was deserted. He couldn't have seen even if her decks were thronged. "However," he reassured himself, "I could sure as hell hear 'em!"

Voices from below were bellowing up at him, many at once. Some called, "Will you spare our lives?" Some said, "We won't come on deck to be killed!" But their tune changed at the first whiff of smoke. There was a wild outcry, a panic in the passage, on the ladder.

They came out of the companion one at a time with arms uplifted. Two blacks searched their pockets. They looked a miserable lot of bad cases, were grimy, bloodstained. There were eleven of them. Joblin, with bitter hang-dog look, was trying to make out that he was somebody else.

Bill smashed all the *Maleuka's* boats excepting one. He made the men pile into the *Maleuka's* remaining boat and

all face aft, except Joblin who was to steer. Bill himself got into the bow.

"Give way!" he said. "And start all the trouble you want any damn time you want it!" Then he growled, bitter and jeering, "*Treasure!*"

The *Marigold's* boat followed, keeping some fifty feet behind. The *Maleuka's* men saw Cullen in the bow. They called curses at him. Bill said, "Stow that gab." He called back to Joblin, "What become of that pasty-faced Douglas?"

Joblin flinched uneasily. His eyes shifted, fluttered. A grunted "Don't know" bubbled at his mouth. Then his glance sneaked sidelong at a man up in the bow, right in front of Bill.

Bill glanced at the man's back. The fellow was wearing a tight cap. Bill yanked the cap off, fixed his hand in the man's black hair, jerked the head back. The fellow's face was almost as black as a native's. Bill rubbed at the man's cheek with scrape of thumb nail. The face, and neck too, had been smeared with grease and powder grime. Bill's nail showed the white underneath.

With Bill's fingers in his hair and head jerked back, the fellow's black eyes gleamed as if watchfully searching for something in Bill's face that he dreaded. It came with a shout: "Samson!" Then, "You ought've sunburnt your face when you shaved them whiskers! When Pete gets hold of you—" Bill stopped. He shoved Samson's head away, dipped his hand over the side to wash it.

Flames were roaring up through the *Maleuka's* forward hatch and swept at the tarred rigging, licking off the water.

Bill felt ill at heart over the burning of the schooner. He didn't give a damn about Joblin's loss; but she was a good schooner. Better than his own. He hadn't the time or men to transfer his stores and take over the *Maleuka*. If he had left her she would have been looted and burned. If he had cast her adrift she most likely would have bumped herself on the coral, blocked the channel. There was nothing for it but fire, and she flamed with increasing roar.

SAVAGES were coming out in canoes, attracted by the fire. They avoided the boats and made for the burning ship.

Madge, a lone figure wrapped about in great oilskins and with big tarpaulin hat down on the back of her shoulders, stood on the deckhouse. It had been a moment of terror when she saw the *Maleuka* in flames and two boats coming as if Joblin's men had left their burning schooner to board this one. As soon as she saw Bill up in the bow of the first boat she went to the rail.

As the boats drew near, Bill made the men rest on their oars and stand away from the *Marigold's* side until Harry's boat went up and his men got on deck, lifting the wounded. Then the men out of the *Maleuka* were put on board, and made to toe a crack.

"Fetch irons and two fathoms of rope," Bill told Harry.

The irons were brought. Bill took hold of Samson's shoulder, pulled him forward. Samson jerked back and Bill hit him. Samson was lifted to his feet and handcuffed. Bill led him below.

Bill took him to his own room, made him fast to the bunk with knots too tight for comfort. Samson begged.

"You blew out the matches when Pete said they hurt, didn't you?" Bill gave the rope an extra yank.

"Ow I can't stand—"

"Annana couldn't either!" said Bill and took a turn about Samson's ankles.

"Ow have mercy!"

"That's what Captain Lewis said when you knifed him, wasn't it!"

Samson's mouth was open as if to howl. It stayed open as if struck dumb.

"Why'd you do it?" said Bill.

"It was through him I went to prison and I—I was innocent!"

Bill said "Huh. I've seen your innocence ever' place you've left tracks! How

it happen Joblin didn't kill *you* to get that note?"

Samson didn't want to talk, or maybe was in too much pain; but Bill put the grip of a Spanish windlass on the turn about his ankles, and with gasps and howls he learned from Samson that Joblin would be ruined if he had to cash in on holdings to meet the payment; so Samson, having known Joblin years before, agreed to ease his own grudge against Captain Lewis and relieve Joblin by murder. He told Joblin he had burned the note, not wanting such evidence about him; but of course he hadn't for in that case he would have had no real club over Joblin's head. He thought it was Bill who had found and carried off the black wallet, so then had confessed to Joblin that it wasn't burned at all, that unless they killed Bill they would both be taken up for murder; and besides they believed Bill did have treasure.

And having talked and howled, Samson whined and begged to have the knots eased; but Bill said he'd be damned first and grabbed up a shirt, tore it.

Samson saw what was coming and clamped his jaw. Bill drew his sheath knife, prodded the jaw. It flew open in a howl. Bill wadded in the cloth, then bound a strip about Samson's head.

"Now," said Bill, "you'll stand it and without complaining!"

Bill went out, closing the door.

Again he stood before the men, looked them over. Only one or two met his eyes, and they with sullen furtiveness.

"You," said Bill, "are going to sail this ship. You're going to do as told and on the jump. You're going to work like hell and say 'Sir!' ever'time you open your mouth. You are maybe going to think I'm a damn fool to turn you loose forward, but try to prove it and you'll wish to God you'd stayed over yonder and been roasted! Get for'ard!"

As they moved away Bill said, "Oh no, not you, Joblin."

Joblin turned, gaunt and cringing.

"First, I want to know how the hell did you know to find me here?"

Joblin, not accused as he expected and dreaded, took heart a little.

"It's all the doin's of that Samson. He came to me that night you were lookin' for him after what he done to Pete. He said there was treasure an' he knew the island. Said the nigger had said there was treasure here on Quica. He hid in my house. Next day he shaved and called hisself Douglas. Then I visited that hurt boy you left with Doc Kelkey. I give him twenty dollars. He said there was treasure, that you had some, and the rest was here at Quica. So—"

"Yes," said Bill. "Pete would have said anything to stop being burnt. The boy lied just to help make a fool of you —But you've left out a part, Joblin. What did you say when Samson told you I had that black wallet, eh? Well, I haven't got it. I never had it. But I've got you and Samson. Harry, take him to the forepeak. Put him in irons. I'll keep the length of the ship between him and that other devil."

Then Captain Bill, recalling that there was a reward—a thousand pounds, he had heard said—for the murderers of Captain Lewis, thought he had better be careful about how he had Samson gagged. "Might suffocate," he thought.

He hurried below, flung back the door, looked in and stood astounded. The port was open. Peter leaned forward, peering through it. Samson was gone.

Peter turned. His face was brutally joyous with a mad look. He held out his two hands, fingers clawlike:

"I killed 'im with mah han's! I broke eveh bone in his body I could twist! An' he couldn't yell! An' while I twist' I talk to 'im 'bout po' little Annana—"

Bill patted the glossy shoulder, spoke hurriedly. "It's all right, Pete. What the hell's a thousand pounds or so! Only don't let anybody know. We'll just say

he got the port open and drowned himself!"

He steered Peter up the ladder and got him busy at making coffee.

Bill got staples and a heavy padlock and fastened them to the door of the room where Pierre lay unconscious.

"I wouldn't much blame Pete," said Captain Bill to himself. "But Perry's got the right to a chance."

CHAPTER XXIV

Pirates' Reward

THAT afternoon in the rain the men of the *Maleuka* bent to their oars, towing the *Marigold*. Joblin was taken out of irons and put to an oar, too.

"Just 'cause you're the worst 's no reason for you to have an easier time," said Bill, "and I'll see as how you don't!"

The *Maleuka*, a charred and smoking hulk, with small winklings of flame breaking out, lay too near the center of the channel for Bill to risk going out under sail. And he was merciless. "You wanted to take this treasure ship in tow. Now you got it!" He wouldn't stir a jib to ease the pull until they were well by the smoking hull.

Two days later in the afternoon the lookout sighted sail. Bill altered his course and within an hour knew it for Wallowaggo Burns' brig.

Bill laughed as he sent up an inverted ensign; and in answer to the distress signal, a boat came driving over the tossing waves from the brig.

As it drew near he recognized the mate and called, "Hello, Mac. Just the man I want to see. If you're heading for Quica, I'm saving you the trouble!"

Young McKenzie called out, "What's wrong?" Bill said, "Lay aboard and see!" Young McKenzie came on deck with springy jumps, gripped Bill's hand, cast an eye about: "Where'd you get that bunch of scarecrows?"

"Them," said Bill, "are pir'ts. Terrible pir'ts. They murdered good old Trader Jim and Mary. They shot—and he's still near dyin'—old Black Perry, the best enemy I ever had, damn 'em! They murdered that little Annana of Madame Gruen's. They tried to board me, but me, needing sailors—there they are! How's old Wallowaggo?"

"He broke his leg last voyage. I'm—um—well—"

"Captain, eh? Good for you! Well, sir, Captain McKenzie, I've got a party on board that don't much like it here. So many terrible pir'ts and things. She's Captain Lewis' daughter and—"

"Captain Dodd Lewis? Madge? Madge on your—*where?*"

"Here I am, Mac!"

Captain Bill thought it about the longest embrace on record.

Bill had a master's certificate and joyfully used it in a wedding ceremony.

Then he coaxed the reluctant young Captain McKenzie to take off Black Pierre. "Pete'll somehow kill 'im if you don't. You can take him to the nuns on Wallis Island. They'll use prayers an' nursing to get him back good and strong so I can lick hell out of him the next time we meet!"

So Pierre, nearly dead from exhaustion and loss of blood, was carried on deck. Bill gave him a cursing in a friendly tone and Pierre smiled as he murmured: "From now is it not that we are friends?"

"Nope," said Bill. "'Cause when you get to feeling good again you'll be your old self, Pierre. You're fuller of tricks than a shark's mouth of teeth!"

Then they shook hands.

Madge's parting prayer as Bill helped her over the side was for him to be careful of those terrible men. He patted her cheeks with tar-stained hands:

"Miss—I mean Mrs. Mac, I'm glad that damn doubloon has brought somebody as deserves it some good! But about me and these turrible pir'ts. They're going to learn, now I got no lady aboard, how hot hell can be even without fire!"

"Put your hands back on the table!" Elton commanded.
"If I have failed the Fatherland," Von Blauzwirn said grimly,
"I will at least die in the line of my duty at the hands of the enemy!"
His eyes had flicked past Elton's shoulder.

SECRET AGENT B-7

By ARED WHITE

CHAPTER I

The Agent From Mexico

OUT of the long narrow windows of the antiquated French barracks that housed American general headquarters in Europe, life for the moment reflected a strangely peaceful aspect. Captain Fox Elton was struck suddenly by this contrasting serenity as he lifted his jaded blue eyes from the cryptic snarl of Imperial intrigue that littered his broad walnut desk in a cubbyhole of the American counter-espionage section.

A clear, crisp afternoon of late September, flawless except for a wide ribbon of fleece floating hazily over the distant foothills of the bloody Vosges. His imagination fashioned it into a white flag hung there in subtle reminder that the folly of war had been carried far enough. But a moment later he dismissed that illusion with a grim smile as the roar of a large staff car dashing through the caserne below jarred him sharply back to tense realities.

Elton recognized the sedan of Colonel Rand, returning from the chateau of the American commander-in-chief across the village, where the counter-espionage chieftain had been closeted since before noon. After a moment's thought he dismissed the sudden premonition of fresh complications in his own affairs. The length of Rand's visit, the harried speed in which he returned to headquarters, might mean pressing new intrigue of the first magnitude. But even so, what

could be important enough to upset Elton's present occupation over the riddle of the mysterious Herr Zumbusch with its tangled ramifications and sinister implications of deep-laid Prussian secret service mischief?

He smiled confidently in the belief that he was not likely to be pulled off this critical case—and a fortnight of effort wasted. And if Colonel Rand now had other fish to fry, perhaps the colonel would not be fretting Elton endlessly with demands for progress reports on a tangle that refused to be hurried.

Elton's knotted brows relaxed again, the stamp of tension cleared from his youthful face as his gaze wandered out the window in grateful relaxation from the relentless grind of weary days. Among the trees that stood precise as grenadiers about the old caserne there were the full rich hues of autumn to feed his eyes, and in the brief respites from roaring staff motors and hurrying messengers, sparrows chattered an inexplicable ecstasy that seemed theirs alone out of a world in the clutches of black horror.

For a moment the baffling enigma of Herr Zumbusch and that ominous intriguer's feline shadow, Babu, was lost in the back of his mind, along with the projected invasion of France by important German agents in Zumbusch's wake. He remembered that this was the first time in long, intense months that he had so much as sensed that glorious serenity of existence that once was the world.

Then Elton's smile narrowed to cynicism. There had been rumors of rumblings among the masses against war. Out of Germany such reports were persistent, of a spreading antagonism to the Kaiser's war toys, of an internal revolt fed by privation and despair and the growing loss of faith in the Herr field-marshals' empty promises of peace by victory.

All such reports Elton had scanned eagerly in the daily Intelligence summaries. But since in Germany there had been spread similar reports of unrest among Allied peoples, he had discounted the rumors of a break across the Rhine. There was really no telling truth from enemy propaganda these mischievous days. Though Elton knew that until the will of the German civilian masses collapsed, the Kaiser's marshals would fight on to the last drop of blood of the last peasant—just as the ill-starred Nicholas had proposed to do.

From these observations Elton was jolted by the slamming of his door. He looked about to see Colonel Rand enter brusquely.

Ordinarily the counter-espionage chief kept his thoughts and emotions masked behind his wide, immobile red face. Rand was a thickset man, tall and ponderous of gait, slow of speech and phlegmatic. His virtue as a secret service executive was a knowledge of military forms and details and a habit of saddling the major work upon competent young subordinates; his fault an inclination to force unwelcome advice and formulas upon his operatives, including Elton, the ace field man of the American service.

But at this moment the colonel looked neither phlegmatic nor ponderous. His eyes were burning, his lips tightly set, his florid cheeks flaming a lobster red. In his hand, extended at arm length, was a large tan dispatch case.

"Here, Elton, take this!" he commanded without preliminary. "It is the file on Major Pablo Pozas, which you will find very complete. A second file will follow. Read it over carefully—I will be back about it in an hour, after conference with the chief of staff."

Tossing the case to Elton, the colonel swung on his heels. At the door he paused and looked back.

"That document was delivered to me a few minutes ago by Marshal Foch," he said with impressive gravity. "Treat it accordingly!"

Elton sat down as the door slammed behind Rand and opened the dispatch case with unrestrained eagerness. The document that came forth was an inch thick, loose-leaf typewritten sheets laced in a leather cover. It was in French, addressed from an agent of the Deuxieme Bureau to the chief of the French secret service, under the unusual caption:

> Detailed life of Henry Fallis McCloud, American Army deserter, more lately known as Major Pablo Pozas, Mexican Army, with photographs, official documents, and other papers appended.

Elton's brows met as he read the first page. A second page and he began skimming through succeeding sheets, his perplexity growing as he searched. Another and more detailed examination of the document left him completely at sea. It was precisely what the heading indicated, nothing more. In minute detail was set down what purported to be the facts of Major Pozas' life.

A biography, rather than a military document. And the only military reference was a brief notation of the fact that McCloud, alias Pozas, had been arrested by the French secret service on his arrival at Paris from London, was being held incommunicado in solitary confinement at the Fortress of Vincennes under a fictitious French name assigned by the Chief of the Deuxieme Bureau.

Why had the French generalissimo come to American headquarters with such a document? Why had Colonel Rand been summoned to the Pershing chateau? Any rational explanation eluded him as Elton finally laid the report aside and turned back to his own work.

Certainly there must have been some other reason for Rand's tension. There hardly could be anything in the Pozas case to warrant sidetracking him from this Zumbusch affair. Pozas was securely in French custody. Zumbusch, and the stellar Prussian agents who were hounding Zumbusch's trail for some utterly inexplicable reasons, were yet to be reckoned with. And in one more week, when a certain Herr Hauptmann von Blauzwirn stole into Paris from Berne, there might be some light to be had on this intricate Prussian enigma.

Elton settled back to another trial at piecing together the accumulated fragmentary information that hinted of some momentous design in the case of Zumbusch. Five cipher messages, mailed from Berne to Paris, all in German invisible cipher. All were variations of the first message, which read.

> Zumbusch must be given every assistance in his plans to destroy President of France and King of England. Zumbusch plan infallible. Maintain close liaison.

Which would have been clear except for two circmustances. These messages, in ordinary lemon juice on the margin of purported business letters, had been done in a discarded German cipher, one that the German staff must know had been broken by the French cryptographers weeks ago. Moreover, the envelopes were of conspicuous design and obviously meant to attract French postal attention. They were addressed to M. Picquart, in care of general delivery; and since no one had called for them, Elton was of the opinion that M. Picquart was non-existent.

Obviously a plant for French consumption. But to what purpose? And another cipher, this one manifestly bona fide, had confirmed the existence of Zumbusch and complicated the mystery of his projected mischief. It was brought across the lines at Gerardmer, in the Vosges, by a Prussian agent who had defended his secret with his life. Broken down after three days of effort by Elton, it read:

> Austrian Zumbusch has reappeared. Reported in Paris to assassinate Allied leaders. May proceed to London. Extend every resource to destroy Zumbusch immediately. Watch for him in most prominent places. Babu probably with him. This case takes precedence over all others until completed.—No. 1.

Of the authenticity of that message, Elton held no question. The courier who brought it through from Paris had fought an American patrol to the death to gain time to swallow the cipher-pellet. A post mortem had been necessary to recover it. And its dire importance was guaranteed by the signature of No. 1, which meant von Ludendorff, German quartermaster general and tactical genius who kept the Prussian military secret service under his own sure control.

From Geneva had come the third Prussian cipher complication, an ingenious trick of concealing messages whose discovery Elton had been at pains to keep to himself. An agent of the Deuxieme Bureau, working as guard on the Bellegarde-Paris express, had picked up an apparently discarded Swiss newspaper stuffed in the seat of a second-class compartment entering Paris from the Swiss frontier. The Deuxieme Bureau had treated the paper to various chemical baths to no purpose. Lieutenant d'Auteuil, executive officer of the Bureau, had included the paper with other suspicious exhibits in asking American cooperation in the Zumbusch case.

Elton, with the aid of a powerful glass, had found certain barely distinguishable perforations made by the smallest needle in the black of certain printed letters. Painstakingly searching out these perforated letters, they had pieced together into coherent words—and the same cipher that had come out of the dead courier's stomach in the Vosges. This message read:

> K-24 (von Blauzwirn) reporting 9-25 from Berlin. We have caused French to be warned of Zumbusch danger. Babu reported with him in Paris from Geneva. Zumbusch must be destroyed at all risks immediately.

Zumbusch's career as set forth in the official records of the Russian Okhrana that Lenin had sent to the Allies in revenge against the old Czarist secret police, further deepened the mystery of German vengeance against the fellow. He was listed an Austrian political agent who had deserted in 1915 to the Russian nihilists, swearing vengeance against the Hapsburgs, and upon the ascension of Lenin had vowed allegiance to the Russian dictatorship. A genius in concealment and in political murders. Brilliant, dangerous, unscrupulous where his own limitless ambitions were concerned. Faithful to no one but himself and those serving him. But to this sinister narrative was appended the following tersely conclusive legend:

> Arrested for counter-revolutionary plots, tried by special court for treason and executed by miltary rifle squad at Leningrad May 12, 1918.

Yet here was Zumbusch in the flesh, goading the German high command to desperate efforts at a second and more conclusive epitaph of their own writing. But why, if Zumbusch was in France on a mission of killing Allied leaders? A mission certainly calculated to inspire German official enthusiasm.

Of Babu the records were equally lacking. A Czarist agent who worked with Zumbusch. "A woman with the face of an angel unless you look beneath the surface and see the soul of a devil." With that cynical notation the records dismissed Babu, omitting her name, nationality, appearance or other serviceable details.

ELTON'S concentration was such as he struggled on with the tangle that he did not hear the opening of the door. Colonel Rand's greeting from across the desk brought him up with a slight start. The colonel helped himself to a chair, sat down very deliberately, crossed his legs and began rubbing his broad red nose with his forefinger, the while observing Elton with deep gravity.

"The Pozas document, Elton, did you not find it very complete?" he inquired in an effort at matter-of-factness.

"It impressed me as an excellent biography," Elton said, with a puzzled lift of his eyebrows. "An excellent biography—of a man now safely in jail."

"Pozas is willing to play the game, Elton," Rand went on. "You see, he is a mercenary adventurer and had no real interest in the Germans. He'll play the game with us in return for his life and a liberal cash consideration. The French have bought him. Not a word of this—not even the Deuxieme Bureau will know what has become of him. He will be delivered to us here tomorrow!"

"Yes, sir," Elton agreed. "But I'm more interested in this fellow Zumbusch, who still appears to be very much at large, sir."

"Forget Zumbusch!" Rand commanded, dismissing the litter of Elton's desk with an impatient gesture. "You can turn that mess back to Lieutenant d'Auteuil. You have a few days in which to devote all your time and thoughts to Pozas. Whatever that report Marshal Foch gave me does not supply for you, Pozas will. The fellow really means to cooperate, the French inform me. And since Pozas is really American at bottom—the case fits you like a glove, Elton."

"If the colonel will make himself a bit clearer, sir," Elton prompted, although the first gleam of understanding had reached him.

Rand shifted his posture and gave a nervous cough.

"Yes, yes, Elton. I'm coming to that. You are to have a—a reasonable time to forget you are Captain Elton. You are going to become Major Pozas—and with all the data furnished us by the French—and Pozas here in the flesh for study—I know you will put it across for us."

A slow smile formed on Elton's lips, and the quiet voice in which he replied gave no hint of the leap of his pulse to Rand's disclosure.

"I rather gather, sir, that I am being sent into Germany," he said, "on a mission important enough to warrant dropping this Zumbusch affair."

Colonel Rand rose, plainly impatient to end the interview now that he had come to his point.

"Yes, Elton, we're sending you to Berlin," he said gravely. "I want you to know that I hesitated to accept such risks for you, sir. I appreciate fully just what danger you face. But the mission is of such tremendous importance that —we must accept any chance of success. Your designation for this duty is Secret Agent B-7. As to the details, please be ready to leave with me early in the morning for Provins. Good afternoon, captain."

CHAPTER II

Secrets Behind the Rhine

HIGH-POWERED staff cars were tearing into the little French village of Provins by ten o'clock the next morning when Elton drew into that place with Colonel Rand. During the three-hour spin down from headquarters, the colonel had puffed thoughtfully at his favorite brand of Manila cigar, lighting one after another, and speaking only in official abstractions.

But if the counter-espionage chief had given him no hint of the day's program, Elton quickly sensed that Provins was the scene of some council of gravest importance. Elderly and middle-aged men, wearing insignia of dazzling rank, predominated, with a sprinkling of junior generals, technical assistants and aides-de-camp. He recognized Haig, leader of the British; Jacques, Belgian chief of staff; Diaz, staff chief of the Italians; Liggett, American field commander. All appeared at the rendezvous at the precise moments from the four points of the compass. They wasted no time in formality, saluting or exchanging bows

as they assembled in the large reception room of an imposing chateau in the village.

"Get every word of what is said, Elton," Rand commanded in a tense aside as they entered. "Take notes if you wish. This conference will make history. It will show you the importance of your mission to Berlin clearly. Justify better than anything I can say my reasons for sending you to Berlin!"

The Allied military chiefs stood chatting in groups for a few moments until, at the entrance of a squarish, bow-legged little man in an inconspicuous gray uniform, they stiffened into respectful silence and bowed or saluted. The little man, plainly embarrassed at the attention accorded him, greeted them with a nervous: "Please, *messieurs,* make yourselves comfortable," and took his position in front of an immense map of Europe.

"*Messieurs,* the time has come to push our offensives," Marshal Foch spoke up at once. He stood with his hands tugging at the seams of his breeches, his level eyes moving restlessly from group to group. "A week ago we had indication that the will of the German people to continue the war had weakened to the breaking point. Now we learn that the German Army intends to fight on, and that the Kaiser's marshals are pressing every resource of the Empire to that end.

"Very well!" He gave a nervous flick at his mustache. "We must carry on the offensive until the German will collapses. During the remaining months until winter, we must continue to attack with coordinated pressure on all fronts. We must be prepared for immense attacks in the spring. America will send over at once another two million men of all arms, and at the same time call another two million men to the colors for transport if needed, which assures us of six million Americans on the front if they are needed. Those of us who are less fortunate in reserves, must muster every available man. We must force a decision this year if possible. We must compel a decision in 1919 at all costs! Thank you, *messieurs.* The tactical conferences will be taken up by groups as planned, immediately, and we assemble again after luncheon, at which I am to have the honor of your company."

Colonel Rand led the way outside and reentered the awaiting staff car with crisp orders to the chauffeur to return at full speed to headquarters.

"It will not be necessary for us to remain for the details, Elton," Rand said as the car got under way. "We have heard all that need be of interest to us. Did you understand clearly what your part will be?"

"Yes, sir. Clearly," Elton affirmed.

The two rode in silence, both occupied by the impressive events in the French chateau. To Elton, it cleared the mystery of the many late conferences and buzzings of staff cars during the past fortnight. What the Allied generalissimo had just enunciated was a decision. A decision that had come out of conferences of statesmen, the formulation of national policies, the thoughts and studies of leaders who represented the countless millions of the Allied nations in their cry for peace.

The car was passing Troyes before Rand spoke.

"The American First Army will continue its attack to the north, Elton. That attack will be supported by all the armies in an effort to hammer the Germans and force them back this fall. Will the German field marshals be able, in the face of such assaults, to hoodwink the German people into raising another million men—which will mean boys of seventeen and old men up to sixty? If so, we will have to bring that other two million men from the American training camps this winter. They will be here in time for the battle of Metz, which the American Second Army will launch in

November or December and complete in the 1919 spring offensives."

"It sounds like a bloody mess brewing in front of us," Elton commented soberly.

"I'm afraid America is in for a real taste of what this war is, Elton, if we have to carry out the Metz offensive. So far, what we've had is a Sunday picnic. The chief of staff tells me Metz will cost us 250,000 men before we get through with it. And if the war goes on next year, they're estimating our casualties at upward of a million men."

"Staggering, sir. That would put us up with the French and English in losses, wouldn't it?"

"Very nearly. But if the big attack succeeds this fall, there might be a chance to break the Boches' bubble before all that happens to us," Rand averred. He thought for a time and turned to Elton in a sudden enthusiasm of manner: "Elton, I envy you this great chance of yours! Don't you see the picture? If things pan out for you as big as they might—why you may bring back information that will shape the whole Allied course. Yes, might be a weighty factor in deciding the date of armistice! Think of such a service, if you win! Secret service or no secret service—you'd get every cross from the Legion of Honor to the Italian war cross—and promotion enough to make you dizzy!"

"And if my foot happened to slip—the German wooden cross," Elton replied with a slow smile.

Rand merely pursed his lips. They were driving into the American headquarters before he spoke again.

"I have allotted you ten days with Pozas," he said. "Following that we will need a couple of days for the detailed instructions you will require on your mission. I will see to it that you are not interrupted in your work—and you may count on any help you wish in getting ready. I believe I told you the prisoner will be turned over to us in the morning. And if you need more than ten days fitting yourself into Pozas' shoes, perhaps we can extend it a few days."

"Ten days will be plenty of time," Elton said tentatively, "provided one thing."

"Provided what?"

"That I can use the ten days to suit myself—with authority to come and go."

Rand turned sharply.

"This is one time of all times, Elton, when you better follow the plan laid down by your superiors," he said incisively. "Notwithstanding your past successes with the Imperial secret service, the slightest misstep in Berlin means a stone wall for you, young man!"

"I appreciate fully, sir," Elton rejoined with a recurrence of the slow smile, "that if anything slips in Germany—it will be my funeral."

"Yours—and maybe a million others!" Rand corrected sharply.

"I'm not going to minimize that fact, sir."

"Then remember that the best minds of the French staff have decided this plan of using Pozas' shoes, and have entrusted us with the responsibility because Pozas is an American. Marshal Foch considered it important enough to deliver the Pozas documents to me personally at the commanding general's chateau. For once, therefore, you should be satisfied to hew strictly to plans and not add any special embellishments of your own!"

"But I mean to follow the Pozas plan," Elton quietly assured. "I merely wanted plenty of latitude in preparation—without having to explain my every thought and move. If I can have that promise, sir, I'll guarantee to be ready right on time."

Rand stroked his nose with a contemplative forefinger. Elton always had been irritatingly insistent upon holding his own counsel and proceeding in his own way against the German shadows. Past successes in trapping the best of the Imperial spies in Switzerland, Belgium

and France had justified Elton's temperament and methods.

A youngster whose aspects of easy good humor were as deceiving as his air of disingenuous innocence and youthful inexperience. His almost boyish features, the mild, friendly cast of his clear blue eyes, had been his passports on many a grim adventure. Back of guileless exterior were nerves of steel, emotions that responded to perfect self control, a mind that had the quick play of a rapier or the faculty of analytical deliberation, as occasion required. A mental machine-gun masked by an ivy-clad concrete abutment. Rand, in an enthusiastic moment, once had said that of Elton to the American chief of staff.

But all this did not lessen the embarrassment to Colonel Rand when higher authority wanted progress reports, essential details of Elton's activities. And Elton's chief was able to offer nothing better to his own superiors than Elton's glib evasions over details. Elton's blunt insistence that walls, even the walls at headquarters, had ears and that too many military chefs would surely cook a secret agent's goose to the crisp was nothing better than an indefensible impertinence.

"Upon the assurance you have just given me," Rand finally decided with a judicious nod of assent, "I am willing to allow you any reasonable latitude in your preparations, Elton. But there must be no basic change—and you must—"

"Thank you very much, sir," Elton put in hastily, and at the colonel's quick scowl, opened the door of the sedan and stepped out. "I'd particularly like to have Pozas held in the guardhouse until I am ready for him, sir. Thank you again. Good day, colonel."

Elton dismissed himself with a smart salute and hurried away before the colonel could launch further questions, objections or reservations. He knew that Rand would never be able to understand the dire complications he had fathomed in this projected invasion of Berlin. The French Deuxieme Bureau would not have overlooked in the deal with Pozas certain inevitable information for their own use and glory. Such as location of the new German rendezvous in Paris. That might put them on the trail of von Blauzwirn at the very eve of Elton's departure for Germany. And if the Deuxieme Bureau landed such a man as von Blauzwirn, their gloating would not be long in reaching German ears.

The Zumbusch tangle, von Blauzwirn, Babu. That mystery was indelibly woven into the pattern of his present project. Of that Elton was all but convinced. Which meant that most of his ten days of grace must be devoted to unwinding that tangle, and little wasted on the fellow Pozas. Rand would object, if he knew. The Deuxieme Bureau likewise would have to be circumvented. As for von Blauzwirn, due in Paris from Berne in four days, just where that emissary from Wilhelmstrasse was to be trapped remained for solution. And if he succeeded in that coup, Elton argued that in some way the von Blauzwirn newspaper cipher might stand him in good stead in his visit to Berlin.

Elton hurried to his private cubbyhole on the second floor of the old barracks. The French could furnish him his masquerade, Colonel Rand could insist upon rigid compliance with instructions, but Elton was determined to lay his own groundwork in his own way.

He opened his door, intent on a free night with the Zumbusch riddle and the whole tangled trail to Berlin, only to find an unexpected visitor waiting in the chair beside his desk, Lieutenant d'Auteuil, of the Deuxieme Bureau.

CHAPTER III.

Covered Trails

THE dapper little Frenchman rose, bowed and extended his hand.

"Pardon my intrusion upon

your office, my captain," he apologized. "But from Paris I telephone for you only to learn you are absent until four o'clock. Since it is that I must confer with you I come at once by plane—and here I am, sir. Your health, it is excellent?"

"Mighty glad to see you, *monsieur,*" Elton replied cordially. D'Auteuil was one man he could well afford to spend time upon for his own good purpose, no matter if the Frenchman came merely to exchange abstract theories on the matter of Zumbusch. "Sorry you had to wait—but my chief has me on the jump today—and it looks like all night. Please, will you sit down and have a cigaret?"

"Thank you," said d'Auteuil, seating himself with solemn deliberation.

"Anything new in the Zumbusch case, *monsieur?*" Elton inquired, bluntly shaping the conversation to business before the French officer could launch the time-consuming amenities demanded by French official politeness.

D'Auteuil touched a lighted match slowly to his cigaret and took a reflective puff.

"Perhaps, my captain," he replied. "Perhaps yes, perhaps no. It is that we cannot decide."

"You mean you've found some new messages?"

"But yes, captain. A cipher in German that is so simple the child could read it in the few minutes. But what it means—who can say of that?"

D'Auteuil shrugged, and at Elton's sudden show of interest, took from his dispatch case a bundle of papers and extended them across Elton's desk. Elton, thumbing through them, saw that they were apparently printed dodgers, done in German, with a pied line across the bottom of each sheet.

"For the American convenience," said d'Auteuil, "my bureau have make the translation into English. This legend it is the same on each printed sheet and so it is, my captain, when you have read the one you have read all."

Elton took the translation, read it through, and then compared it with the original in German. It read much like the usual run of propaganda dodgers used by all combatant nations: "Do not be mislead by military propaganda. Remember your duty and be ready to pay for peace with your life!" It was addressed to no one, bore the signature of no organization, unless conveyed by the jumbled line of type underneath, which read:

WKH ZKLWH IODJ PDUFKHV IURP DPVWHUGDP.

D'Auteuil leaned forward and, with many gesticulations, elucidated the key for reducing the cryptogram to its meaning.

"It is nothing more, my captain, than that each letter of the cipher represents the letter in the alphabet that follows it by three letters. So—A means D, and B means E, and C means F and so on through the alphabet. Is it not the cipher for infants, my captain? Please, will you not run it through for yourself?"

Elton jotted down the alphabet and by following the key D'Auteuil had given him quickly wrote out the solution:

THE WHITE FLAG MARCHES FROM AMSTERDAM.

Some moments devoted to checking and study convinced Elton that the Deuxieme Bureau mathematicians and cryptographers had made no mistake in their analysis. But what was its purpose? Certainly no military or secret service agency could use such a cipher with even the remotest hope of secrecy. Any regimental headquarters would be able to translate such a message in a few minutes.

"The circumstances under which you found this?" Elton inquired.

"It is found in the barbed wire in front of the French strong-point near Vourcheres, which is in Belgium, my captain," said d'Auteuil. "During the night it was deposit in our wire entanglements. Much propaganda is left for our men by the Boches, calling upon them to desert and end the war. But why this one, which is printed in German and has no meaning to our men? So, it finds its way back to the Deuxieme since no one at the front can make sense of it."

"Has your bureau made any progress or evolved any definite theories?"

"But no, my captain. My Colonel l'Ourcq believe the bundle it must have dropped upon our wires from the balloon. This he conclude because there is a singe on the outside papers. Most possible, my captain. The news-balloon it has the cruising area of 500 kilometers if the wind is right and with the load of a thousand of these little sheets, which can be released when a slow fuse burns the retaining cord of the balloon. But why should these be released in our wire, my captain, unless by a poorly timed fuse? Also, it is that only the English have such balloons. Of the English we have made careful inquiry. No balloons have they release within the fortnight."

Elton rose and went to his wall map of the far-flung battle areas of the western front. Carefully he measured its distance from Brussels and the Holland frontier.

"This bundle was picked up three nights ago, I understood you to say," he addressed d'Auteuil. "Have you checked up on the meteorological data for that night in the area east and west of Vourcheres?"

"But yes, my captain. Every detail have we checked of Colonel l'Ourcq's theory." He shrugged. "But the wind, it was carrying to the east on that night. Because of that, our regiments to the north of Vourcheres used it to carry gas ahead of a trench raid in force."

The better part of five minutes Elton spent running his finger back and forth slowly along the Belgian front, then sat down and studied the printed sheets that had been found in the French entanglements. His own suspicions and the conclusion that was shaping itself in his mind he kept to himself when he turned back to d'Auteuil, intent on closing the interview as quickly as possible.

"I'm mighty glad you brought this matter to me—even if it doesn't appear to mean anything just at present," he said with finality. "But if you will permit, *monsieur*, I'd like to ask a few questions on another subject. Concerning this Mexican your bureau picked up in Paris lately, Major Pozas, did you learn from him the new German spy rendezvous in Paris?"

D'Auteuil, normally complete master of his feelings, was tricked into a perceptible start by this blunt question. But he covered quickly with a smile.

"So it is you have heard of the mysterious Major Pozas?" he asked lightly. "But of him, even the Deuxieme Bureau knows so little. It is that Colonel l'Ourcq took him away. Where? I do no know, although Monsieur le Colonel hint that Pozas went to the chateau of Marshal Foch for question."

"Beg your pardon for asking an embarrassing question," Elton apologized. "I'd heard very confidentially from Colonel Rand of the Mexican—and thought if he disclosed the German nest in Paris, it might lead up to some new slant on this Zumbusch puzzle." Elton got up and fumbled suggestively with the papers on his desk. "May I have one of our officers take you to dinner, *monsieur*? I'm terribly sorry Colonel Rand has me so engrossed I can't be even decently polite at present."

"C'est la guerre," exclaimed d'Auteuil, rising with a smile and picking up his cap, gloves and riding crop. "But my

airplane is waiting at Hanlon field and it is that I must return to Paris. When there are more developments, my captain, I will keep you inform. If you have the thoughts, please that you give me what you call the jingle?"

"Of course, *monsieur,*" Elton assented. "Thank you again for coming and I will do my best on this new cipher. A pleasant ride back to Paris."

Elton resumed his seat, his mind busy with the thoughts that d'Auteuil's disclosure had set in motion. Oblivious to the passing dinner hour, he pieced together and analyzed the vague and scattered shreds of possible significance out of the interview. Colonel l'Ourcq's theory of a balloon carrier must be correct. Whether or not the English alone were equipped with such balloons was immaterial. The material fact was that the wind blew from the west that night and, therefore, a news-balloon would be launched only from Allied soil. A premature burning of the release fuse would account for deposit of its freight upon the French front lines. And certainly the cipher message had no meaning to the French. The Deuxieme Bureau would be prompt to pick up any such meaning. Therefore, since the cipher must have some significance, that meaning must lie behind the German lines.

Elton got up and walked slowly back and forth across his little office under the impulse of these conclusions. Zumbusch's trail. Vague as it was, did it not piece in with the whole cryptic tangle on his desk? The meaning—that was no clearer than anything else in the Zumbusch puzzle. Why was the German secret service sending von Blauzwirn, star operative, needed critically in many places, on the trail of Zumbusch? Why had the French been tipped to Zumbusch's presence behind the Allied lines? Why had the Prussian operatives entrenched in Paris received instructions to give Zumbusch's destruction right of way over all other missions at a time when the destiny of the Kaiser's empire tottered in the balance?

Those enigmas were no more answerable than the one of this simple cipher from the French front. But Elton counted them now with a quickened expectation. Von Blauzwirn would know the answer. Von Blauzwirn would arrive in Paris on the fourth day thereafter, if no suspicion intervened. And in d'Auteuil's evasion of his question, Elton had read French knowledge of the German receiving-station in Paris. Pozas must have given them that information as a necessary part of a hard bargain, and doubtless been sworn to strictest secrecy on the point, even against American ears. The Deuxieme Bureau would want that information for its own exclusive use and glory.

Elton hastily assembled the mass of documents from the top of his desk and locked them in a safe. The weariness and strain lifted from his face as he saw long days of groping give place to a chance for action. He remembered that he had not eaten since morning and left the caserne with a buoyant step for dinner at the Hotel de France. After that he decided to find relaxation at a French cinema.

That adventurer Pozas, whom he was to take over tomorrow, now loomed as something more than a spy-dummy whose name and credentials Elton must carry to Berlin. Pozas was the key to a tangible trail, von Blauzwirn's trail. There were three days in which to get what information he wanted from Pozas, a fourth day in which to bait a trap for the Prussian agent in Paris.

CHAPTER IV

The Prussian Nest in Paris

ON HIS desk the next morning Elton found a supplemental Pozas document, under guard of a major from the chief of staff's office, who took Elton's

receipt for it. It consisted of passports, vises and secret credentials by means of which Pozas had threaded his way from Mexico City and upon which Elton must depend in traveling to Berlin

The French, Elton quickly saw, had been fully justified in their belief that the Pozas papers offered an exceptional chance for an Allied masquerader to enter the German lair. Moreover, the Deuxieme Bureau had worked up the project with amazing resourcefulness and exacting attention to detail. The Mexican's passports, with their English and French vises, bore Elton's photograph in place of Pozas'. Since the photo was not detachable, this had been effected by fading the original, re-sensitizing it and then exposing it to the negative of a photo of Elton.

The Pozas presence in Allied territory was made logical by a letter bearing the Mexican seal that proclaimed him on a neutral mission to Switzerland to carry out a confidential economic mission for the President of Mexico. Except for a cable tip from an alert French attaché in Mexico City, Pozas, with such credentials, might have escaped even the sensitive suspicions of the Deuxieme Bureau.

Equally invaluable, for Elton's purposes, were the documents found in the lining of Pozas' coat, after he had been trapped. An ordinary letter addressed to a Mexican official at Berne had taken on an altogether different aspect when given a chemical bath by the Deuxieme Bureau technical experts. It was in reality the Pozas credentials to Wilhelmstrasse, vouching for him as a resourceful officer who could be used to good advantage in enemy countries and advising that he was prepared to identify himself.

A tiny enclosure, under wax seal, bore Pozas' finger prints. These had been exchanged for Elton's in an identical envelope upon which the seal had been replaced with microscopic attention to every detail. Likewise, the French had reproduced the letter to Wilhelmstrasse with an identical German invisible ink, taking pains to copy every mark, stain and fold of the original.

Elton completed his scrutiny of these documents with a glow of satisfaction. A perfect chain for his masquerade. He need only perfect a reasonable familiarity with the Pozas career and associations in Mexico, particularly with the German attaché who had coached him. Not that he minimized the difficulty of invading Berlin. There was always the risk of some slip.

He knew that he might be picked up before he was little more than across the frontier. Or he might cross Germany, present himself and his credentials at Wilhelmstrasse—only to be greeted by the taunt of his own name. Such were the normal risks of this game of mask, a firing squad the quick reward of slightest mischance or error of maneuver.

Having determined his procedure with Pozas, he telephoned to the headquarters guardhouse for the delivery in the flesh of the man from Mexico. Pozas was marched in ten minutes later between two armed sentries in charge of a sergeant. Elton sat measuring his man without apparent interest as Pozas was brought across the room to a halt.

"What's the cap'n's instructions, sir?" the sergeant inquired.

"Leave your man here," Elton instructed. He motioned Pozas to a seat with a casual toss of his hand.

"We'll be in the corridor, sir," said the sergeant. "I've got two men under the window below. Don't need to worry about the prisoner escaping."

"Thank you, sergeant," said Elton in his softest voice, and centered his eyes upon some routine papers that he had placed on his desk.

For some time Elton seemed to be absorbed in his work. In fact, he was analyzing the face and figure that his

mind had photographed. Pozas was a chunky little man with a round, pugnacious face and small glinting, restless eyes. A man of quick wits, violent temperament, shrewd without depth. In no respect had Elton anything in common with Pozas. There was not the slightest similarity of physique or appearance. The fellow's whole makeup quickly confirmed Elton's plan of dealing with him.

"Any objections to smoking, sir?" Pozas finally spoke up.

Elton looked up slowly. Pozas' voice was soft-spoken, but with a note of nervousness. He was sitting with his arms folded and though his eyes met Elton's squarely, there was an effort in his seeming ease and composure. In reply Elton held out his cigarette case. Pozas helped himself and puffed with evident relish.

"Pozas, tell me just how you came to desert the American service and change your name and citizenship to Mexican," Elton demanded bluntly.

"An impossible captain, sir," Pozas replied promptly, self-justification in his voice. "He bawled me out like a pirate for something I didn't do. Got me so mad I knocked him down. Knowing that meant twenty years in Leavenworth, I jumped over the border. Being a good artilleryman, I got along good with the greasers. That's the whole tale, captain."

"And next you sold out to the Germans, eh, Pozas?" Elton suggested.

Pozas blinked rapidly and turned brick color at this thrust.

"A fellow's got to live," he protested. "When a man's own country treats him like that—"

"Let's forget all that," Elton interrupted. "We'd never agree. The point I'm making is that there's no reason why I should put very much trust in a fellow like you, Pozas. Anyhow, I don't intend to. I'll expect you to deal open and direct with me. No evasion or equivocation. If you don't, I'll kick over your little bucket and refuse to play—and you know what that'll mean to you."

"I'm going to play this game on the square, cap'n," Pozas affirmed, setting his jaw and looking Elton straight in the eye as he announced this virtue. "I know what it means—and I'll give you the straight dope on everything you ask."

"Good," said Elton, going at once to the point for which he had paved the way. "The first thing I want to know—is where you were to report to your Germans in Paris?"

Pozas weighed this query for several glum moments and shook his head.

"I took an oath to the French I wouldn't mention that to anybody," he said. "They told me what I was wanted for here—and that was their party."

"Equivocation, Pozas. Answer my question!"

"But I took my oath, sir—and my word of honor." His eyes brightened as he added the plea: "I'm playing this game strictly on the square, cap'n—and if I double-cross the French now, mightn't I do the same to you?"

Elton smiled cynically at the fellow's protestation. Pozas was the stripe to act only according to his own fears and hopes of reward, without scruple or conscience.

"So you're afraid it might get you into a tangle?" he taunted. "Very well, let me show you just where your real interests lie—so far as staying here on this little earth is concerned. I'm going to Germany in your shoes. If I don't come back—what happens to you?"

Pozas' jaw loosened as he pondered Elton's insinuation.

"I'm going to play the game square—and that's the most I can do," he argued.

"Also you're going to take your share of the risk, Pozas," Elton threatened. "If I come back from Germany, you're

in the clear. If I don't, there will be the logical presumption that you slipped me up somewhere along the line. Therefore, my success or failure is very much yours."

A glint of defiance flared in Pozas' eyes.

"It is with the French I have my understanding," he argued. "I'm their prisoner—and their colonel said—"

"Don't fool yourself, Pozas!" Elton broke in. "Just remember that you're an American deserter, with a court-martial hanging over you. And a new charge of treason if we want to press it. It wouldn't be anything as easy as Leavenworth for you now!"

Pozas licked his lips, his skin suddenly ashen.

"What do you want to know for?" he evaded.

"For our mutual protection, nothing more. If I've got to be Major Pozas to the Germans, naturally I'd like to try the part out on the Germans in Paris before poking my nose into Germany."

Pozas' shifty eyes roved the room in indecision.

"Maybe if I had the cap'n's word of honor it was just between you and me," he proffered tentatively, plainly suspicious of some trick to test his oath to the Deuxieme Bureau.

"You have that word, Pozas. In fact, I have my own reasons for wanting it strictly between you and me."

"Will the captain take the full responsibility—and order me to tell?"

"Yes. If it's an order you want—I direct you to tell me immediately what I've asked."

The pseudo Mexican made up his mind. He left his chair and leaned across Elton's desk.

"The flower shop at No. 20 Rue Montross," he whispered.

"Did you report at that place when you reached Paris?"

"No, sir. The French picked me up when I got off the train from Le Havre."

"All right, Pozas. Thanks. Here's a book for you to read—while I do some work. Make yourself comfortable until I want you again. If I'm not mistaken, you've improved my chances in Berlin fifty per cent and your own risk accordingly. Help yourself to cigarets."

If Pozas had feared himself on thin ice at breaking faith with the Deuxieme Bureau, Elton's words put him suddenly at ease. He slipped back into his chair with a grimace of relief and puffed at a cigaret with relish. Elton searched out the Rue Montross on his map of Paris. A minor thoroughfare, little more than an alley two blocks in length, leading off the Boulevard St. Marcel some distance southwest from Pont d'Austerlitz. With that locality he was unfamiliar, which meant a thorough reconnaissance well ahead of von Blauzwirn's arrival. Thanks to his foresight in breaking the French seal from Pozas' lips at the very outset, there was ample time for baiting that trap.

Carefully listing the information he would require at No. 20 Rue Montross, Elton resumed his interrogation of Pozas. That rogue now supplied information with enthusiasm. The German station at Paris, he disclosed, was in charge of a Monsieur Gobert, who lived at the place in order to be available at all hours. An intricate code was used for identification. Elton wrote down this code as Pozas supplied it, a complicated formula requiring close rehearsal, since enunciation and emphasis of certain French words was a necessary part of the key. Certainly the Germans had hedged in M. Gobert with excellent safeguards against imposters.

When he had satisfied himself upon these vital particulars, Elton began studying the Pozas biography. Colonel Rand dropped in shortly and beamed his satisfaction at Elton's occupation.

"Glad to see you hard at it, Elton," Rand approved. "I'll not interrupt you

but a moment. Just wanted you to know that you're to have this fellow day and night if you want him. And I'll be able to boil down my final instructions to a few hours—so you can put in every minute getting ready for the big junket. Everything going to suit you?"

"Even better than I expected," Elton replied, smiling innocently.

"If there's anything you want, just call on me," Rand prompted as he turned to go.

"Thank you—but I'll try not to bother the colonel with details," he replied.

Elton smiled to himself over this exchange as the colonel left. There was one thing he wanted—an order of automobile transportation to Paris for the second day after tomorrow. But he knew such a request would only stand the counter-espionage chief on end. Rand not only wouldn't approve, he'd be furious. His idea of orders was their literal execution. Elton was to become Pozas, therefore he must study every mannerism and thought of that individual. So there was not only the Deuxieme Bureau but his own chief to be circumvented in the present tangled scheme of things.

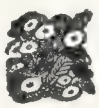
During the afternoon and evening, and through the next two days, he kept Pozas in his office solely for the effect on Colonel Rand. A few hours of interrogation gave him such details of the Pozas career in Mexico as he wanted. As for the Pozas personality, there was nothing about that jumbled mess of a man he wanted to adopt, preferring to create his own role, carry out his own interpretation of the man from Mexico. On the evening of the third day he turned Pozas back to the guard and went to the motor pool to request a car for Colombey les Belles, knowing that only written orders would yield him transportation to Paris. He drove to his billet and changed into civilian clothes.

Rand would be searching for him in a rage before noon tomorrow, he knew. To the Rand mind his departure with an official car would be absence without leave, if not actual disobedience of orders, an offense complicated by the grave mission for which Elton was expected to prepare himself in strict adherence to the official formula. As the car spun northeast on the route to Colombey les Belles, Elton directed a turn into the first road to the left, and at the chauffeur's hesitation, gave him a crisp order.

"Veer off into the direct route to Paris," he said. "We're going to the big city tonight—without orders. I'll assume full responsibility."

CHAPTER V

Three Glasses of Cognac



NO. 20 RUE MONTROSS was one of those dismal old stone rookeries in which a small shop is so often to be found, presided over by a superannuated tradesman who ekes out a living on casual customers. The place was remote, quiet, unpretentious, the last place to excite suspicion. There had been a flower shop there for twenty years. Monsieur Gobert had run the place for the past seven years, coming to Paris from Brest, where he had operated a groggery on the waterfront for five years. He had few customers in the neighborhood, but depended upon transients and random customers going to the near-by cemetery. Rarely had more than one or two patrons been seen at his shop in the course of a day.

Elton gathered this information by a discreet reconnaissance in preparation for entering the place. Gobert's Alsatian background and his presence at Brest both tied into his present occupation, Elton thought. Brest was the French naval port, where the Germans would keep secret agents in times of peace, as well as war; and Alsace, by

reason of its proximity to Germany, was a breeding place for German agents. And if Gobert had served Germany all these years under the noses of the French Deuxieme Bureau and Paris secret police, he was an agent of more than ordinary discretion and resourcefulness.

The express from the Swiss frontier was due in Paris at seven o'clock. While date of arrival from Geneva had been disclosed by the ingenious newspaper cryptogram, Elton put equal credence in his own deductions as to further details. Travel by airplane or auto was possible. But with the frontier under rigid French vigil, a von Blauzwirn would choose train as the safest means of invading France, in the guise of a neutral traveler with flawless passports and logical business in Paris.

At learning that the Paris-Lyons express was running on schedule, Elton went on foot to Gobert's place, arriving there a minute or two after five o'clock. A bell jangled over the door at his entrance, bringing from a rear room a waddling old man whose cane and flowing whiskers identified him as M. Gobert.

"*Monsieur?*" inquired Gobert, the conventional greeting of the French tradesman.

Elton went to a small pot of geraniums, casually plucked a petal and rolled it between his thumb and forefinger.

"I wished some flowers for a sick friend," said Elton. "Have you some fresh gardenias?"

"I regret, *monsieur,*" Gobert replied, "but gardenias are difficult to get at this season, and too expensive for my poor shop."

"What do you suggest then?"

"Your friend is a man or lady?"

"She is a young lady, *monsieur.* A singer at the Circe de Paris."

"Would you wish to consider a dozen of roses?"

"I never cared for roses. Have you primroses? If so, I would like five francs' worth—or on second thought, make it seven francs, twenty centimes."

"You wish to see what I have, *monsieur?*"

"Immediately, *monsieur.* I have an engagement for dinner at the Palais d'Orsay at eighteen of the clock."

Gobert stood a moment, his head cocked to one side, his lips moving slowly as if weighing words and enunciation. Without change of expression or voice he asked Elton to follow him into the rear of the place. A large room equipped as kitchen, bedroom and dining room led to a smaller room in which the only furniture was a table and two chairs.

"What is your business, *monsieur?*" Gobert inquired, placing a chair for his visitor.

"You will have a very important customer here in a few minutes, *monsieur,*" said Elton. "It is necessary that I interview him as soon as he arrives."

"I have no authority to make such arrangements for my customers," said Gobert. "But if you will name whom it is you wish to consult, I will do my best for you."

"It is the Herr Hauptmann von Blauzwirn, arriving from Geneva," Elton replied quietly.

Through the interview Gobert had remained the humble French florist waiting upon a customer. Not even when he accepted Elton as an Imperial emissary had there been the slightest change in manner or concern. But at the name of von Blauzwirn, a sudden vitality brought up his shoulders, his eyes burned with incredulity.

"But that doesn't seem possible, *monsieur,*" he protested. "The Herr Hauptmann is not expected in Paris, nor have any arrangements been made for his protection."

"Nevertheless, he will be here at any moment, and I must see him as soon as he comes," said Elton.

Gobert did not debate the matter but went into his living room for a bottle of cognac, which he set on the table with two glasses. He had lapsed back into the simple Monsieur Gobert, though his brows were knotted in a perplexity.

"Please that you inform me of your visit, since I know of no one coming to Paris," he said, taking the cork from the cognac bottle and then seeming to forget to fill the glasses. "Not in two weeks have I had a visitor from Switzerland."

Elton knew the flaw in his own masquerade. The cipher message that had given him the word of von Blauzwirn's visit had necessarily failed to convey that information to Gobert, to whom the captured German spy-runner must have been carrying it. Hence the seasoned Gobert's perplexity might quickly turn to suspicion, notwithstanding his visitor's perfect identification. Since any logical explanation might prove dangerous, Elton merely played for time against the von Blauzwirn arrival—and for any information that Gobert might drop.

"As to why you were not informed, I cannot enlighten you, *monsieur*. My service gives me my own instructions, but not more than it is necessary to know. I presume that the Hauptmann von Blauzwirn is coming on the matter of Zumbusch, which is giving us all so much concern."

"But Zumbusch has gone on from Paris, *monsieur*," Gobert said quietly. "Of that I made full report a fortnight ago."

"You had learned that Babu left Geneva for Paris?" Elton prompted.

Gobert's brows knotted at this query, but he replied at once.

"That she-devil also has gone on, of which fact I sent information. The Englishman, Creechwood, has been standing by in a fever for word to follow on to Amsterdam. Of this I have made three urgent reports by courier, and no reply have I received, although a courier came yesterday from Geneva. Do you bring no other word for me, *monsieur*?"

Elton had made full use of his fragmentary information. A dozen questions shaped themselves, subtle leads for information. But notwithstanding Gobert's frank answers, there was something in the fellow's eyes that warned him to caution. Gobert was not exactly suspicious, but Elton sensed that he was being studied, doubtless every word, inflection and reaction weighed by a proven master of secret service intrigue. And the name Creechwood had a strangely familiar flavor which he did not try now to place.

"My sole mission here," Elton averred, "has to do with the Herr Hauptmann, whom I must see as quickly as possible."

"Yes, of course—as you previously told me," Gobert rejoined with a ready nod of acceptance. He picked up the bottle of cognac, started to fill his own glass, then absently righted the bottle.

"But I was going to ask you of your service," he said pleasantly. "Anything you wish to tell me, *monsieur*. Perhaps also it is well that I inspect your passports and papers, since the French police—"

"Certainly, I see no reason why we should not speak frankly on all matters that I am allowed to discuss," Elton agreed, taking the Pozas vise from his pocket and handing it to Gobert. "You may see that the English and French already have stamped them."

The jangling bell over Gobert's front door brought a welcome interruption to the interview. Gobert stood up to consult a mirror placed at the rear wall.

"A customer," he announced, suppressed excitement in his undertone. He remembered to bow to Elton, casually. "Pardon, *monsieur*, for the few moments. Perhaps it is the one for whom you are waiting."

Elton rose as Gobert ambled out and had a glimpse of the visitor, reflected

into the room by the skilfully placed mirrors that gave M. Gobert a view of his flower shop. The customer stood in front of the geraniums, confirmation of von Blauzwirn's arrival. Elton resumed his seat and composed himself. He knew that he must face two shrewd and ruthless agents who would play safe if their slightest suspicion was aroused. If the cards fell right, he might gain priceless light on the Zumbusch tangle. But at all costs he must land von Blauzwirn and Gobert, to cover the Geneva cipher loss and his own route to Berlin.

The new customer lost little time in identifying himself. A brief hum of voices and the two came into the room. With Gobert was an erect man of medium stature, in civilian clothes of English pattern, whose round pleasant face, straggly blond mustache and mild blue eyes suggested an English clerk rather than a Prussian of the military caste.

"I am the Herr Hauptmann von Blauzwirn," he announced bluntly in German, and proceeded with disconcerting frankness. "I am just arrived from Geneva, to learn that you are waiting to see me. Please, will you present your orders—a mere formality, to be sure."

Elton picked up the Pozas passports and presented them. Von Blauzwirn's frankness, the approving smile with which he read the credentials and passed them back, struck Elton with its note of inconsistency.

"Our attaché at Mexico City has advised of your coming, *señor,*" said von Blauzwirn. "With such credentials as these you should be of great value to us in the present situation. Please, will you not sit down? Herr Gobert will excuse himself, if it is your wish, *señor.*"

"Thank you," said Elton, guarding his voice against a growing uneasiness. "The message I bring is for the Herr Hauptmann's ears alone."

"To be sure," said von Blauzwirn agreeably. His eyes lighted as he nonchalantly inspected the label on Gobert's cognac. "Before you leave us, Herr Gobert, perhaps you will be good enough to serve a glass of brandy," he proposed. "I rather need a stimulant after a long day on a stuffy train."

"I am honored, Herr Hauptmann," said Gobert, going into his living room for a third glass.

Gobert filled von Blauzwirn's glass, then his own. Casually he removed a fleck of cork from the neck of the bottle with his thumb before pouring Elton's glass. Von Blauzwirn lifted his glass and drained it in a single gulp. Gobert consumed his cognac in several leisurely swallows.

Elton moved back slightly from the table, rejecting the drink, and his hand went slowly to the pocket of his coat, gripping the butt of his pistol and releasing the safety. His tense readiness for action was not reflected in his face. But he knew that von Blauzwirn had sensed a trap, that both had decided to play no chances with their visitor from Mexico.

Under von Blauzwirn's smiling unconcern was deadly design, back of his semblance of easy gullibility a mind that had gone incisively to the flaw in Elton's masquerade. If Gobert did not know von Blauzwirn was coming, how could this stranger with the Mexican passports have that information, unless the cipher from Geneva had gone astray?

"The cognac is excellent, *señor,*" von Blauzwirn prompted with a polite smile. "Will you not join us?"

"Thank you, no," Elton replied decisively.

"If you would prefer a glass of wine, I have an excellent Chambertin in my pantry," Gobert spoke up.

"Thank you, no," Elton refused. There was a quality in his smile that he thought von Blauzwirn would interpret as he added: "I find I must guard my health with the closest care."

"As you please, *señor,*" von Blauzwirn

said with smiling unconcern, and nodded to Gobert. "If you will excuse us for confidential business, Herr Gobert."

Only by the minute contraction of muscles at his jaw had von Blauzwirn betrayed to Elton's observant eyes the mood that lay behind the Prussian's mask of nonchalant good humor, the fellow's determination to play the game through by wile for a better advantage than that of the present moment. Elton was at the point of action against Gobert's departure from the room, when there was the intervention of Gobert's jangling bell.

He saw a momentary rift in von Blauzwirn's poise, a sharply inquiring glance at Gobert as the host rose and consulted his mirror. Gobert started and turned to raise palsied finger to his lips in warning.

"*Francais!*" he whispered. "*Francais gendarmes, messieurs!*"

Gobert pulled himself together promptly, masked his shaken wits, rounded his shoulders and ambled out to answer the summons. Although Elton's wary eyes were fixed upon von Blauzwirn, he caught the movement of a door, a panel that moved slowly down across the opening and sealed the room.

CHAPTER VI

A French Bargain

VON BLAUZWIRN settled back in his chair, smilingly composed, and folded his arms. A moment later his eyes distended in a momentary exultation across Elton's shoulder, then dropped to the table as if to cover what they had seen. But Elton was not tricked by this ruse into relaxing his vigil. The maneuver merely confirmed von Blauzwirn's violent intentions. The Prussian next took a silver cigaret case from his pocket, and, at finding it empty, reached towards his coat pocket.

"Put your hands back on the table!" Elton commanded, and as von Blauzwirn complied, added quietly: "You have known for some moments that I have the advantage, Herr Hauptmann. I have no slightest intention of losing it."

Von Blauzwirn smilingly leaned across the table.

"You misinterpret my intentions, sir," he said, speaking excellent English in a low precise voice, a quizzical light in his eyes. "May I speak frankly? You are an American, an agent of the Allied secret service, my friend, operating under the credentials of Señor Pozas. At once I recognized the deception when I found you here. It also is obvious that the interception of certain cipher messages brought you here. Is that not correct, sir?"

"Your deductions are excellent, Herr Hauptmann," Elton replied. "Worthy, in fact, of the excellent agent you are reputed to be."

"Thank you. Then the name Zumbusch is not unfamiliar to your ears. A case in which you must know that our interests are identical, sir. Now permit me to explain my frankness and my courteous treatment of an enemy—whom I encounter so unexpectedly. My instructions at Geneva were to communicate to the proper Allied attachés at The Hague, upon my arrival in Holland, certain information that will insure activity of all nations in destroying Zumbusch, who is equally a menace to all. Doubtless you have learned already that Zumbusch's present intention is to assassinate the President of France, the Kings of England and Belgium and their premiers. Unhappily, the Austrian is equipped to put into successful effect at least a dangerous part of such plans as his radical mind may create."

"That is not altogether news, Herr

Hauptmann," Elton replied evenly. "But German interest in the welfare of Allied leaders is a bit unusual, don't you think? If my memory serves me, your staff at Spa recently sent a Russian agent to France for that specific purpose."

"A stupid mistake, which I confess to be true," von Blauzwirn said with a mild embarrassment. "But permit me to add this information, which I had intended giving you, when your suspicions grew violent despite my best efforts to prevent disturbance. Zumbusch is an agent of the Russians; a creature of Lenin's whose known hope it is to seize the power of Europe while we are occupied by war—exactly as he did with Russia. Therefore, you will believe that Zumbusch has immense financial resources and many venomous henchmen in all parts of Europe. It is no exaggeration to say that no valuable life in Europe is entirely safe while he is left alive."

"Particularly your Kaiser and his marshals, Herr Hauptmann?"

"I cannot very well discuss that with you, but you are free to make any deduction you please."

"What other details?" Elton prompted, and added in the voice of a man who speaks of a familiar subject: "What is your service doing about the white flag at Amsterdam?"

The question stirred von Blauzwirn to an amazed excitement which he failed wholly to conceal.

"You will pardon me," he replied with finality. "I have no other details which it is proper to give. In a moment, when Herr Gobert returns, I must be on my way. In view of my own frankness and friendliness, I am expecting you to treat me with the same accord. Under the circumstances we both must remember that we are officers and gentlemen first of all."

Von Blauzwirn said this with quiet assurance. Elton had supposed that the Herr Hauptmann was playing for time, holding his attention until the Gobert summons had clarified, but this further ruse brought amusement to his face.

"Of course," he rejoined. "I'll be very glad to join in your fine altruism, if you will prove your good intention with something more than words. If you will drink a toast to our success—of the brandy Herr Gobert poured for me—"

A commotion intervened from the adjoining room, an excited French voice bellowing at Gobert. Threats that his establishment was to be taken apart stone by stone and left in ruins unless he disclosed immediately the secret exit by which two suspicious visitors had disappeared.

Elton stiffened into readiness for emergency. Now that he knew there was no help from Gobert, that he was hopelessly trapped, von Blauzwirn could be counted upon to seize his last hope —violence. The fellow leaped to his feet in a moment, whipped out his pistol in defiance of the cold odds against him, and as Elton was at the point of firing, tossed the weapon on Gobert's table.

"I disarm myself," he said in a low, vibrant voice. "But I do not surrender to blind fools. I refuse to abandon my duty—and I leave here immediately, with your consent or without it!"

Elton stepped back at this unexpected maneuver as von Blauzwirn, his jaws set, his eyes blazing determination, moved slowly forward towards him.

"Keep back, von Blauzwirn!" Elton cautioned, leveling his pistol. As the Herr Hauptmann hesitated, he added the warning: "If you are decided on suicide, Gobert's brandy is less painful than a small-caliber bullet!"

Von Blauzwirn stepped forward, grimly stubborn in his decision. Elton saw that the fellow was in deadly earnest, a last desperate gamble for a secret exit on the chance that the American would not shoot him down in cold blood.

"If I have failed the Fatherland," von Blauzwirn said, grimly facing the ominous muzzle now close to his forehead,

"I will at least die in the line of my duty at the hands of the enemy!"

Elton elevated his muzzle as he pressed the trigger, then dropped the weapon and closed with von Blauzwirn as the explosion filled the little room. The fellow struggled with a frantic strength, but to no purpose against Elton's steel grip.

There sounded the fall of axes on paneling and in a minute excited gendarmes crashed through the splinters with drawn pistols. Elton was having a view of leveled French muzzles when Lieutenant d'Auteuil came in. At seeing the American the jaunty little executive officer of the Deuxieme Bureau was tricked out of his prided *savoir faire*. Astonishment, followed by a quick chagrin, shone in his face.

"This is the Herr Hauptmann von Blauzwirn," Elton spoke up, shoving his prisoner to the gendarmes. "I have followed your wishes closely, *monsieur*. You have arrested Herr Gobert the florist?"

"But yes, my captain," d'Auteuil said with a puzzled lift of his eyebrows. "But I did not know—"

"Will you please have your police take the prisoners away at once, *monsieur*," Elton broke in quickly. "I wish to make my report to you and learn if you have any further orders for me."

D'Auteuil gave the police terse instructions for the removal of von Blauzwirn and Gobert, and turned back to Elton in nettled inquiry.

"Please, *monsieur*, sit down," said Elton. "I wanted your gendarmes to leave with the idea that I acted under your orders. I feel that you and the Deuxieme Bureau are entitled to the full credit—and we will forget that I was even here. But there is a small favor I wish to ask in return, one of great importance to me."

"You are very generous, my captain," d'Auteuil exclaimed, his face lighting. "It is you who are entitle to—share the glory, but if there is some good reason I will not insist. For the favor you wish, I am at your service, my captain."

"Von Blauzwirn and Gobert, are they certain of execution as spies, *monsieur*?"

"*Certainement*, my captain. In a few days they will be decorated with the *croix de bois* at Vincennes."

"If you are short of evidence in the case of Gobert, *monsieur*, that glass of brandy should yield something to your chemists. But the favor I want to ask is that you not execute Herr Gobert, at least not by firing squad or guillotine."

"*Le bon Dieu*, my captain, but we have found that he has served Germany as a spy in France for many years! Nothing should save such a scoundrel!"

"I appreciate fully, *monsieur*, that I have no right to ask for his life. My only thought was that if he should die here of a violent influenza, after a brief illness of which the neighborhood has full knowledge, it would be very helpful to me in a certain case I'm working on. After his death his body can be buried in a simple neighborhood funeral, with no gendarmes present. A month from now you can have the body for your spy plot at Vincennes if you wish. But for the present, I'd like the damage here repaired quickly and Gobert put to bed in care of a French doctor."

D'Auteuil weighed the difficulties and objections of this grotesque plan for some moments, but finally gave consent.

"*Oui*, my captain. To the Colonel l'Ourcq I will present it as my own request, and he will not refuse or ask too many questions. Our chemists will provide the excellent cultures of the Spanish influenza for Herr Gobert's lungs. *Voila*, it is done, as you request!"

"Thank you, *monsieur*," said Elton, rising and grasping d'Auteuil's hand. "I want to be the first to congratulate the Deuxieme Bureau upon its great work here tonight. Now if you'll forget that I was so much as in Paris, I'll be shoving off back to headquarters. Good night, *monsieur*."

CHAPTER VII

Through the Swiss Frontier

ELTON was lying on the floor, across a copy of a Paris evening newspaper of the night before, when Colonel Rand came in the next morning. The captain was searching the paper under a heavy magnifying glass, a long thin needle poised in his right hand, with which he made an occasional thrust with great care. So deep was his preoccupation that he did not sense the colonel's presence.

"Good morning, Elton," the colonel spoke up. "What game's this you're playing?"

Elton got to his feet, prepared to have it out with the colonel. But there were no storm signals in Rand's face.

"Just some relaxation, sir," Elton replied, smiling. "Something to amuse myself with on my vacation to Berlin."

The colonel smiled at the retort, an unusual concession on his part.

"Hope you didn't need me yesterday, captain," he said. "Fact is I had to go to Colombey les Belles before breakfast —and didn't get back until late. Two airplanes stolen up there—looks like German spies."

"There was nothing I needed yesterday, sir," Elton said, congratulating himself inwardly upon this unexpectedly fortunate break. "But I'm glad you're here this morning. I'm all finished with Pozas."

"Finished?" Rand echoed incredulously. "You've got six more days. What do you mean?"

"I'm all set to shove off for Berlin, colonel. The sooner I get away the better."

Rand sat down, crossed his legs and solemnly massaged his nose. Elton's voice had communicated his determination even more clearly than did his words.

"If you feel you are ready," Rand decided at last, rising, "I'll take the matter up with the chief of staff. If he has no objections, I can give you your detailed instructions this afternoon."

Elton resumed his needle operations as Rand went out. Since long before daybreak he had been thus engaged. Prior to that he had been piecing together the fruits of last night's adventure in Paris. The way was clear, now, into Berlin. Clear so far as he could hope to make it. Not only had the trapping of von Blauzwirn and Gobert blasted the most dangerous stumbling block from his course, but had given him fragmentary information which he felt free to gamble on.

The mystery of Zumbusch was as inscrutable as before. Small doubt but that the Kaiser's possible assassination played some part in Prussian secret service activity. Elton had guessed that long since, von Blauzwirn had confirmed his theory. But there was far more than that to this German baying on the trail of Zumbusch. Yet, even without further details, the Zumbusch riddle would serve his very good purpose in shaping a cryptogram for Wilhelmstrasse in von Blauzwirn's cipher.

Colonel Rand was back in half an hour, solemn bearer of cheerful tidings. The chief of staff said Elton was to have his own way. The detailed instructions would be ready for rehearsal immediately after luncheon. Elton checked over his final arrangements. Two suits of serge, linen, toilet articles, a few personal effects already were packed in a large leather traveling case, all supplied by the French secret service, every article of Mexican manufacture. An automatic pistol supplied him was of Spanish make, one commonly used in Mexico. He added no articles of his own, no concealed inks or pigments for makeup, no slightest clue for Prussian betrayal. The case was not one for disguises. He must depend upon his passports, his rôle of Pozas—and his wits.

The newspaper over which he had been working, he sewed into the shoulder padding of the suit he would wear to Berlin. The credentials in ink from the German embassy at Mexico City were sewed in the lining of the same coat. Their only danger was in betraying him to some prying agent of the Deuxieme Bureau along the Swiss frontier, which would seriously embarrass his mission. There could be no exposing his hand to the officers of the French secret service.

RAND'S instructions were a detailed exposition of the mission Elton had heard out of the mouth of Marshal Foch. What was the popular will for war of the German civil populace as reflected in Berlin? Had loss of enthusiasm for the struggle developed antagonism of a large element of the public? Were there any open disorders? Peace meetings openly held? Political dissention in the Reichstag and in the public squares? What was the discipline of soldiers on leave from the front?

An English observer from Copenhagen was going into Kiel to study reports of a mutinous spirit in the German navy. The French were using three agents in the German industrial centers, Germans who had been under cover until this time. Belgium had an Alsatian agent in the Ruhr. But most important of all was the information it was possible to glean in Berlin. Upon these reports, Allied policies must shape themselves. Was the German popular spirit close to the breaking point?

If so, violent offensives using millions of men would bang against the German lines in an effort to force decision—and bring peace. Were the German masses, disillusioned and facing ruin, doggedly determined to fight on through another year in a last desperate gamble for peace by victory? Then the Allies must mass vast new forces from America, and prepare to carry on into 1919.

The colonel, for the first time in their service together, took Elton's hand when the interview ended.

"Good luck, Elton," he said solemnly. "Here's hoping you'll make it through. Are there any letters you're leaving—anything you wish done—in case you don't—in event things don't pan out just right?"

"I expect to die some day, colonel," Elton replied heartily. "Everyone does, sooner or later. But I've not paid the Germans the compliment of writing any farewell letters this time. If there's nothing further, sir, I'll be shoving off."

Colonel Rand ignored a levity that ordinarily must have offended his sensitive dignity.

"We'll all be pulling for you," he said earnestly. "Pulling hard. If ever we needed your success, your country needs it now. Good luck again."

In the staff sedan that whisked him to Paris on the first leg of his journey to Berlin, Elton exchanged his uniform for civilian clothes. When he left the car with his luggage at an obscure point on Avenue de Choisy, he waited for a passing taxicab in which he proceeded to the intersection of Rue de l'Estrapade with Rue d'Ulm, there taking the subway to the Place de l'Etoile, from which place another taxicab landed him at the Hotel Continental.

After a belated dinner in his room he went to the Opera Comique for what was left of the performance, then returned to the hotel and went to bed. In the morning he timed himself to arrive at the Gare de Lyon with barely time enough to get his ticket and board the express for the Swiss frontier.

The shuttle-train that landed him early in the evening at Annemasse gave place to a trolley into Geneva. At the Swiss frontier he had no trouble with his passports. French and English having stamped approval on the Pozas vise, neither Swiss nor French frontier inspectors were unduly skeptical. But by the time he left the trolley in Geneva, Elton

knew that the shadows had picked him up at the border, two furtive agents working independently. Whether French or German he was uncertain. The secret service of both countries had their network spread across Switzerland.

He took a horsecab and drove about the city until the hour for the boat to Lausanne up Lake Geneva.

CHAPTER VIII

The Route to Berlin

ON the boat to Lausanne, he got a better view of the shadows. He guessed that one was French, one German. But their activities he would use to his own purpose when he reached Berne. From Lausanne, the night train put him into the Swiss capital early the next morning. He emerged into the Spitelgasse and took a taxicab to a small restaurant for breakfast, drove about Berne until ten o'clock, the hour when embassy and legation suites begin emerging from the night's activities, and made his way to the office of the Mexican charge d'affaires.

That official must have been left to puzzle for many hours over his visitor, Major Pozas, who presented no credentials and chatted inconsequential nonsense for fully a half hour without making rhyme or reason out of his interview. From the Mexican office, Elton circled the city, ostentatiously changing taxicabs half a dozen times, for the benefit of those observant eyes in his wake.

Anon the Mexican consulate would be discreetly felt out in regard to Major Pozas. His disclaimer of any knowledge of the Pozas purpose in Berne might nettle the French secret service. But the German ministry would understand perfectly that, as well as the Pozas indirection in driving thereafter to the Imperial military attaché in Berne.

Reporting at the German ministry, he was passed through a succession of diplomatic majordomos and assistant attachés. While one took away his passports for microscopic study, three others took turns at questioning him upon his antecedents and past movements. It was after three o'clock before he was escorted finally into an elaborate chamber to face a slim, severe figure who scowled from behind an immense desk of carved teakwood.

"I am Colonel Count Sixt von Esch, attaché of the Imperial Army," the man behind the desk announced, his voice indicating that this was a statement of fact and not an introduction. "You are ten days behind any reasonable schedule in reporting at Berne since your arrival at London, Major Pozas. I'll hear your explanation!"

The colonel's mood and manner was that of a captain who deals with some refractory recruit.

"Your attaché at Mexico City, Baron Schmeldt, offered no objections to a reasonable visit in London and Paris, Herr Colonel," Elton replied evenly. "Some reasonable precautions in coming to Switzerland seemed desirable."

"What credentials have you brought with you?" the colonel demanded.

"Your—assistants took my passports," Elton replied.

"Pay attention!" von Esch snapped. "I did not ask for your passports but for your credentials if you have any."

"I beg your pardon, Herr Colonel," Elton apologized. He hurriedly took out his penknife, slit the lining of his coat and tendered the sealed letter Pozas had carried from Mexico. "I understood these were to be presented only at Berlin."

Von Esch examined the seal under his monocle, held the envelope up to the light and returned the document to Elton unopened.

"What further identification have you to offer? I presume you reported your presence at Paris."

"At No. 20 Rue Montross, Herr Colonel," Elton affirmed. He repeated the formula of identification used on the hapless Herr Gobert.

"Herr Gobert has made no report of this."

"That may be due to Herr Gobert's serious state of health, Herr Colonel. I understand he is threatened with Spanish influenza."

"Gobert ill?" Von Esch was sharply concerned. "I have had no report of that, either. Did Gobert give you any such report to be delivered to me?"

"No, Herr Colonel. Herr Gobert introduced to me at his flower shop a certain Herr von Blauzwirn. In his name I am to deliver at Wilhelmstrasse a newspaper."

The rimless monocle dropped from von Esche's eye. He caught it with a violent swoop of his lean hand.

"A newspaper from von Blauzwirn!" he snapped. "Why did you not deliver it to me instantly!"

"But it is sewed in the padding of my shoulder, Herr Colonel. I am to deliver it only to Berlin."

"I'll accept it! Deliver it to me at once."

"I'm very sorry, but I have no orders to do that."

The colonel glared malevolence and struck the glass top of his desk with both hands.

"I'll not tolerate such impudence," he barked. "You will act as I command!"

Elton looked him coolly in the eyes.

"I am a soldier, Herr Colonel," he said in a voice as level as his eyes. "I have a certain obligation at Berlin. No one with whom I have dealt had told me you have any authority to change my orders. I trust you will pardon my insistence."

The von Esch temperature cooled gradually, under a tattoo of finger tips. Precisely the reaction Elton had counted upon. He had dealt with irate colonels before, and estimated that this one was no different from the others. In a moment the colonel stabbed a call buzzer with his thumb. As if a part of the mechanism a blond young man in frock coat bobbed into the room with a servile bow.

"Where's Herr Dittmar?" von Esch demanded.

"Excellency, the Herr Lieutenant has not returned from his luncheon at the Bellevue-Palace," the other reported.

"Then telephone him to get back here instantly!" von Esch bellowed. "Get a car ready for him to travel the moment he reports to me for his orders. Another matter—send a wireless to Madrid. Herr Kauffer will proceed tonight from Marseilles to Paris, prepared to take over Herr Gobert's duties." The colonel jerked a thumb toward Elton. "And have this fellow wait until he's wanted. That will be all!"

Twenty minutes later, Elton's solitary wait in a small room was ended by a flushed young man who came in somewhat out of breath and introduced himself as Herr Dittmar. Any doubts as to how he had fared under the colonel's cautious if gouty inspection were removed by Dittmar's announcement.

"A lucky rascal, Herr Major Pozas," he exclaimed. "*Lieber Gott,* but what would I not give to be in your clothes. Going to Berlin tonight. Ach, poor old Berlin isn't herself by any means these days—but what wouldn't I give for a week in the city away from these Swiss!"

Elton rose and bowed. Dittmar, a polished dandy of the type common to embassy suites, was flushed from the haste in which he had left the Bellevue-Palace, and obviously from the luncheon he had indulged in at that luxurious rendezvous of diplomats and international adventurers. Elton asked no questions. He followed Dittmar out into a large sedan. The car sped into the heart of the city, threaded its way west out of the Marktgasse traffic, hurried across the Aare and headed south by west into the open country.

Judging from the brief time that had elapsed since Dittmar's summons, Elton guessed that the young attaché's instructions had been terse. Nor did Dittmar display any of the colonel's contempt for this mere mercenary from Mexico.

"So, Herr Major, you carry a message from dear old von Blauzwirn," Dittmar said, as Berne whirred behind. "Ach, but what wouldn't I give for that lucky rascal's chances at Paris and Amsterdam! How was the Herr Hauptmann feeling when you saw him—still as somber as when he left Berne?"

"He seemed very serious when I last saw him, Herr Lieutenant," said Elton. "But I presume that is because the Deuxieme Bureau is working Paris with such a fine comb these days."

"Yes, but they will be no match for von Blauzwirn. A devil for shrewdness!"

"He impressed me as a gentleman very confident of his ability to take care of himself," Elton said gravely.

Dittmar gave a long, rippling laugh. "But the old dog will never live down the one in Berne! At the Bellevue-Palace he had dinner at the next table to Babu, the one person in the world he most wanted to find. She, well knowing who he was, attempted a flirtation, and von Blauzwirn might have fallen except for his argument that an officer of the Intelligence service must keep his mind strictly on business while working a case."

Elton shared Dittmar's merriment over von Blauzwirn's blunder, and said indifferently: "The Herr Hauptmann mentioned the jade in connection with the Zumbusch case. I rather gather she is a slippery one."

"The most cold-blooded she-devil in Europe, Herr Major. *Ja*, it was Babu who came to Switzerland two years ago to find a secret Russian colony that was planning a counter-revolution, led by Ivan Klopstov, enemy of Lenin. So this Babu, posing as a dairy maid, married Ivan, who proudly invited all his friends to the secret wedding. The wedding list, Herr Major, was the prize Babu came to Switzerland for. *Ja*, it became Lenin's execution list when Klopstov's force later went to Russia. Only one escaped—Sergius Klopstov, the brother of Ivan, who swore dire vengeance if it cost him his life."

Dittmar took a reflective puff at his cigaret.

"But what chance of vengeance for a witless clown such as Sergius Klopstov, Herr Major? Was it not that everyone, including the Herr Colonel, saw the wench dining at the Bellevue-Palace or driving about Berne, or at the opera? But not once did they expect to find Babu in such a woman, one whose manner and poise and beauty was that of a princess. Perhaps only if you looked at her very closely, when she was not posing, could you detect the treachery under the surface, the heart of a tigress hidden behind her face of a madonna!"

"But a woman of that appearance ought to be conspicuous enough to find without trouble, wouldn't you think, Herr Lieutenant?"

"*Ach, Gott,* but how can you follow the color of her hair or the arch of her brows, or her complexion, even her expression of face!" Dittmar exclaimed feelingly. "The only description we can depend upon is that she has fine features and a rare beauty. But can we arrest every beautiful woman we see on suspicion? A change of dress, posture, expression of face, perhaps a new dye in her hair—and Babu is another woman!"

"I heard little of her," Elton commented, and asked innocently: "She is suspected now of being an enemy agent?"

"Worse than that—an agent of Zumbusch," Dittmar said vehemently, and lapsed into ruminative silence from which he roused himself in a moment to inquire intently: "Was there any word of Zumbusch in Paris, Herr Major?"

"Pardon, but is it proper that I dis-

cuss what little I may have learned from the Herr Hauptmann concerning the fellow Zumbusch?" Elton inquired.

"Anything you were not expressly forbidden to tell," Dittmar rejoined. "I am an attaché of the German ministry, Herr Major, and schooled in discretion. Always we must guard our tongues and conduct ourselves with the greatest discretion—even after much champagne. So you may speak freely with me, Herr Major. So you will understand my interest, I was on the trail of Zumbusch in Switzerland for three months—and there is the hope that I will join von Blauzwirn in Amsterdam very shortly, if he needs me when he arrives in Holland."

"Von Blauzwirn told me he expects to have all the Allies join in the hunt for Zumbusch," Elton said simply. "Beyond that I heard nothing of importance, although I presume there is something important in the cipher I'm taking to Berlin." After a pause, he turned a perplexed face to Dittmar. "But what puzzles me, is why they should waste so much time and fuss over this Zumbusch. You'd think he was an emperor or something. Didn't sound reasonable to me, Herr Lieutenant."

"*Lieber Gott,* but Zumbusch right now is more dangerous than a dozen army corps!" Dittmar averred hotly. "There may be no end to his mischief if he is left free to set the wolf-packs howling and yipping all over Germany! Will not our armies find themselves stabbed in the back if a million swine forget their duty to the Fatherland? Yes, because they do not have all the meat and cake for their greedy bellies, they are crying for peace. Peace, peace at any cost. Even the Landwehr and Landsturm are complaining—their empty heads inflamed by the propaganda of the Russian swine who revolted against their lawful masters and ruined Russia."

The burst of passion in which Dittmar spoke gave place to a confident smile.

"But nothing will come of that danger to Germany," he averred. "The Imperial secret service will take care of Herr Zumbusch in short order—and even if it failed, our field marshals would put a stop to any nonsense behind our fighting fronts."

The car had been tearing down a winding dirt road, trailing a thick streamer of gray dust. It turned sharply south through a forest and began the ascent of a wooded plateau. In the background were the Bernese Alps with their white shoulders in the skies. Elton was puzzled by this maneuver. At first he had thought Dittmar was taking him to some small railway station out of Berne, to avoid observation. But they were traveling now away from any railway line, and not towards the Swiss frontier.

At reaching the high terrain the car twisted and turned through alternating woods and open meadows into a wide level field, at one edge of which Elton saw the answer to this puzzling junket. A large Junker plane lay ready for the takeoff, its propeller spinning as Dittmar came up and returned the pilot's salute. Dittmar eyed the plane wistfully.

"*Ach, Gott,* but you are the fortunate rascal," he exclaimed. "You will see the sun come up in the morning over good old Berlin. *Auf wiedersehen,* Herr Major."

CHAPTER IX

Wilhelmstrasse

THE black void through which he had been gliding and bouncing for what seemed an eternity was thinning into a dazzling sheen of blue and rose when Elton caught the great expanse of smudge below that marked the capital of Prussia, his destination. The plane banked sharply into a swirling descent and pounded a landing field beyond the Tiergarten to a stop.

A leaden-faced young officer who in-

troduced himself stiffly as Lieutenant Angst took immediate possession of him. A terse order to an orderly who got Elton's grip, and the three went to an awaiting German staff car and moved off towards the city. A short ride brought them to the Tiergarten, thence through the impressive stone colonnades of the Brandenburg Gate into Unter den Linden.

The great broad street was deserted, except for an occasional straggler, going to work early or returning home late. Herr Angst was soberly uncommunicative and Elton asked him no questions.

The car swerved from the vista of lime trees and chestnuts to a jolting stop in front of the Wilhelmshof, a pretentious but antique hostelry that had known far better days. Into this Elton was escorted by the stiff Herr Angst, and to a shabby suite of living room and alcove on an upper floor.

The Herr Lieutenant kept arrangements in his own hands without once consulting Berlin's official guest from Switzerland and Mexico. A waiter was directed to bring up breakfast for one. When Elton had shaved, bathed and breakfasted, Angst issued further instructions.

"At ten o'clock you will report with me to Wilhelmstrasse," he said crisply, adding with a glance at his wrist watch and a peremptory jerk of his thumb towards the alcove bed: "That allows you three hours in which to get some sleep, Señor Major."

Having delivered himself of this edict Angst took a morning newspaper from his pocket, sat down and lighted his pipe. Elton turned in without comment or show of protest. Angst's conduct nettled him. Did it mean that he was to be kept under close surveillance while in Berlin, little more than a prisoner?

But after the bumpy ride from Berne in which there had been little rest, he argued that a sound nap would not be altogether lost time before facing the day's adventures. In what seemed the next instant, he emerged into wakefulness to find Angst prodding him with a riding crop.

"We must go at once to report!" he announced. "The Herr Major will not tolerate delay."

The streets had filled with people and vehicles in the intervening hours. Plodding horsecabs cluttered Unter den Linden, motor cars were a rarity. Elton noted that the cabs were drawn by dilapidated, bony old crowbaits. And even from the vehicle he could catch the solemn, heavy faces on the sidewalk and in cabs. With eager interest he studied the humor of that human stream. Faces in London and Paris had the same gloomy cast, he remembered. But not the same intensity of wretchedness nor the same evidence of tension, even sullen brooding, that he saw reflected here.

The jarring blare of brass caught his attention as they swerved into Wilhelmstrasse. In the distance he had a glimpse of a marching mass, a ragged column of eights extending back many squares. Even in the distance Elton caught a violently discordant something in the vague sea of human faces. But a moment later he put the spectacle from his mind as the staff car stopped at a large stone office building.

There was no such indirection here as that of the German legation at Berne. Herr Angst piloted the visitor from Mexico through a network of minor bureaus direct to a large office, paused to study his watch, and at the precise instant of ten o'clock, threw open the door.

"Lieutenant Angst reporting the courier from Switzerland to the Herr Major von Keukle," he barked, and turned on his heel to close the door behind Elton.

A beefy man with a round severe face managed a friendly smile and motioned Elton to a chair beside his desk. Von Keukle indulged unhurried amenities, intended to emphasize his friendly inten-

tions, and shortly extended his shiny silver cigaret case.

Elton took the case firmly between his thumb and fingers and unconcernedly opening it extracted a German cigaret. He knew the meaning of this little gesture. The case was coated in minium, which meant that the Herr Major was taking his fingerprints. With what records might they be compared? But Elton did not allow sense of danger to crystallize. He was Major Pozas, who knew nothing of minium-treated cigaret cases, and whose fingerprints could invite no firing squad. With a steady hand he lighted the Herr Major's cigaret, returned the case and smiled his gratitude.

"With your permission," von Keukle said as he dropped the case in his pocket, "we will take up our business. May I have your credentials and the message you have brought to me from Paris?"

Elton removed his coat, slit lining and shoulder, and delivered the two documents. Von Keukle took them and left the room, saying they must be taken up for deciphering in the bureau of ciphers and chemistry. He was back promptly to initiate his own inquiry, a random series of questions, asked in a casual way as if he merely followed a routine that was of no particular consequence. But Elton quickly saw that no expert at criminal cross examination searched the mind of a suspect more adroitly.

Elton replied promptly and with the same quiet unconcern in which the questions were put to him. Until long past noon the inquisition continued. Von Keukle interspersed his questions with an occasional apology, intended to keep the visitor wholly at ease. It was all mere formality, he said. An unnecessary procedure so far as he was concerned, but required by his superiors. That was because they had been tricked once by an English imposter posing as a Belgian.

"There are not only the spies of the abominable Allies to watch these days," said von Keukle, "but those of the lunatic Zumbusch. But Zumbusch will not trick us. Already a dozen of his henchmen have stood with their backs to our walls."

Elton's brows met. "Lately I have heard often of this Zumbusch," he said with innocent perplexity. "I gather he is someone of importance, although I never heard the name before landing in Europe."

"The most dangerous assassin in Europe, Señor Major," von Keukle vowed. "But we will destroy him and his whole infamous organization before another month. Already we have that problem well in hand."

A signal at von Keukle's desk buzzer broke the tension of his prying eyes. He rose and marched from the room. Elton settled back in his chair and folded his arms. The Herr Major's absence lengthened into wearying minutes. An hour passed, Elton quite alone. He had no doubt that his every expression and movement were under observant eyes. As time lengthened he slumped low in his chair, closed his eyes and dozed.

CHAPTER X

An Unexpected Host

WHEN the major finally reentered, Elton made no pretense of being deeply asleep, but rose deferentially with the blank expression of a soldier who awaits instructions. With von Keukle now was a trim man of middle age in civilian clothes of expensive cut.

"I wish to present Herr Staubenwasser of the Imperial Intelligence service," said von Keukle. "Herr Staubenwasser will see to your accommodations and comfort while you are in Berlin, Señor Major—and I can assure you he is the most excellent host."

Staubenwasser bowed and saluted with informal friendliness.

"Your credentials are acceptable,

Señor Major," von Keukle announced. His eyes narrowed back into boring inquiry as he added, casually, "But of course, the Imperial secret service must accept nothing for granted these days. So—your pardon—we have cabled to Mexico City for certain verifications which we will receive in a few days. I'm sure you will enjoy yourself in Berlin, Señor Major, even if it is a matter of a week or a fortnight. Then we will discuss important terms, of interest to you."

Elton left the bureau with Staubenwasser, who took a staff car to the Patzenhofer at the nearby corner of Taubenstrasse. Staubenwasser's heavy efforts at cordiality were as puzzling to Elton as the fellow himself. The Prussian was of reserved temperament, cold visage and obviously an aristocrat of the Junker caste who found the Pozas company wholly distasteful and beneath his dignity. But he was at pains to conceal that inner attitude and keep up a show of cordial hospitality.

They were finishing luncheon over a bottle of wine when the same blaring music of the forenoon on Wilhelmstrasse sounded from the streets. A few moments later the motley procession began passing the Patzenhofer. Old men and boys, women and children; a scattering of German uniforms worn by crippled throwbacks from the fighting fronts. They marched eight abreast, close together, a solid wedge of humanity, gloomy, tense, sullen. Elton read the legends of their banners. "We want food!" "We demand peace!"

"In Mexico," Elton said pointedly, "there are jails provided for people who carry on such antics against the Government. I am surprised at the toleration you show in Berlin—when you are engaged in a war."

"*Himmel,* but the swine do nothing more than parade the streets with their banners," Staubenwasser sneered. "To me that is treason, and to be dealt with accordingly. But—the Reichstag itself has lost its spine, and the Emperor's marshals are compelled to exert great patience. Ach, but with the first great victory on our western front, these same swine will be yelling their lungs out with joy!" Staubenwasser drained his glass and got up. "There will be another hour of the disgusting spectacle, which gives me a nausea," he muttered. "Please, I will deliver you to your hotel."

Staubenwasser's car forced an opening through the glum column and swept across Unter den Linden into an open street, in which the demonstration was left promptly behind. At reaching the Wilhelmshof, Staubenwasser opened the sedan door.

"I regret that I must excuse myself this evening," he said. "But I have the records of an important international spy to examine. Tomorrow I shall hope to have you for dinner at the Prinz Friedrich Karl, and afterwards to the Royal Opera for the ballet."

Elton, at finding his movements thus left to his own volition, hesitated a moment in front of the Wilhelmshof, then swung into the crowd down Wilhelmstrasse. The same story was graven in the faces. Misery, hopelessness, sullen weariness, grim acceptance. Berlin was nauseated with the war.

Elton found a motor cab after several blocks afoot. There were several hours of daylight remaining. At the Reichstag he got out to look up at the statues at the eaves and the huge equestriennes of the roof. He got out again at the massive statue of Frederick the Great in Under den Linden, drove slowly past the Arsenal, the Royal palace and the museums.

But his round of the chief sights of Berlin was for the eyes of the Imperial secret service. Though he had identified no shadow, that only meant skilful operatives dogged his trail, recording his every action. The driver whirred him into the outlying districts, through Kopenock and Weissensee and Rummels-

burg. Haunts of the workers, tradesfolk and small clerks. He stopped for dinner at a large cafe of the second class across the Spree. For the time he was Elton again, searching over the day's adventures, analyzing, dissecting, drawing his deductions.

His pulse quickened at his final decision. Even now he could make his report to headquarters. The one day in Berlin was enough to tell the story—after what the unwitting Dittmar had disclosed. He could have fared no better if the Imperial secret service had taken him wholly into confidence and betrayed its Royal masters. Germany was a powder-keg of revolt against its Imperial masters.

Everywhere his trained eyes had read the confirmation. In the faces of the marchers, in the want and sullen misery of the populace along the curbs. Moreover, the field marshals were not deceived about this. But disaffection was too widespread to handle with violent suppression. They must use the weapons of patient propaganda and prepare the German mind with plausible new promises of peace by victory.

And for some reason which he had not divined, Elton knew that the mysterious Zumbusch was the firebrand who threatened to touch off the powder-keg. Perhaps by assassination of Wilhelm and the field marshals, the three black geniuses of Germany's woe.

He cleared his mind as the meager meal drew to an end and composed himself. With details he was no longer concerned. The case of Zumbusch must await his return to France. By a miracle of fortune he had achieved his larger mission. Marshal Foch must have the report without delay—to unleash the final Allied thunderbolts that would end the war with 1918—before that projected slaughter of Metz.

Elton's face reflected the unharried expression of the sight-seeing Pozas as he emerged into the night crowds. He had no need to simulate the lightness of his step as he turned in the direction of the Wilhelmshof. His one great problem now was to leave Berlin behind. At all costs he must get back to France, without delay. He would have the night to plan that.

An erect civilian whose square, hard face was wrapped in a wolfish leer accosted him as he entered the Wilhelmshof.

"Please, Herr Pozas, I have another stopping place for you," he said disagreeably, in good English. "The Wilhelmshof is reserved for loyal Germans. The place I recommend is better suited to American spies. In the name of the Kaiser I arrest you for espionage."

Elton surveyed the agent with a cold amusement.

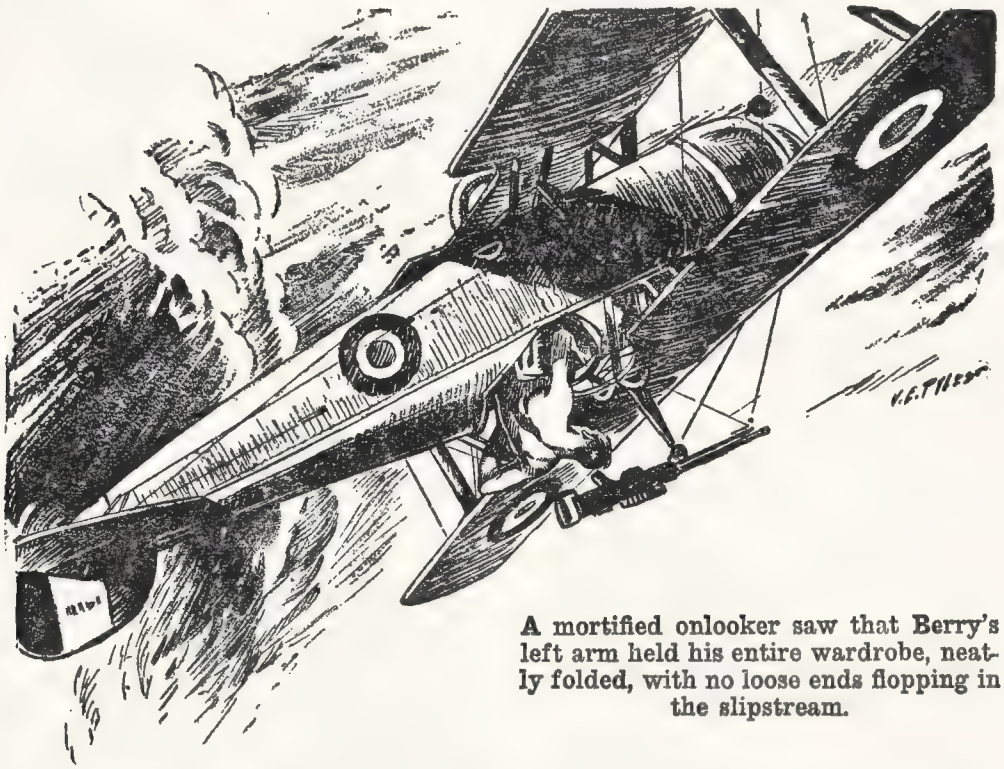
"Don't you think you may be making yourself rather ridiculous?" he inquired coolly. "Perhaps an inspection of my credentials—and my authority for being in Berlin—will save you serious embarrassments."

"You will think me less ridiculous," the German rejoined with a mocking grin, "when I advise that we have your entire record, from date of birth to arrival in Berlin this morning. So, you are not the first American fool who thought he could outwit the Imperial secret service! *Ja*, but we had your whole story as an enemy agent even before you left Switzerland."

TO BE CONTINUED

ACROBATICALLY GOOD

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY



A mortified onlooker saw that Berry's left arm held his entire wardrobe, neatly folded, with no loose ends flopping in the slipstream.

LIEUTENANT BERRY of the A. E. F. had ideas that all the good pilots seemed to have. His flying, seen day in and day out by open-mouthed observers, was awe-inspiring stuff. He'd take a Nieuport-27 to ten thousand feet. At that altitude, Berry would throttle his motor. Off the stick and throttle would come his hands. Off the rudder bar would come his feet. Then the ship would start spinning, whipping and whirling through all the gyrations of a falling leaf. And while it fell free, Berry would busy himself with the taking apart of his camera gun. This, you see, to train him how to handle his mitts regardless of what his plane might be doing. Upside down, wing down, tail high, slipping, zooming, split-S'ing, doing anything and everything, and still he could hold his equilibrium and carry on with the strange work in hand. And that was his own idea, too. He was bound that, once on the front, the fear of gun jams would never get him down. He'd be able to clear all such stoppages, even if he had to rebuild the darned gun while falling.

That way of training was odd but not crazy; but his best stunt was cuckoo. Berry would come out with all the clothes you'd expect to find on an Arctic pilot or heavy-loaded deep-sea diver. He'd have a bulky, cumbersome teddy-bear with fur lining. Over said teddy, Berry would be wearing "elephant feet." They were the floppy, sloppy fleece-lined flying boots that went with cold weather and altitude work, and they went over the ordinary shoe or field boot; and

Berry, of course, would be wearing his shoes under them. Under the teddy was his usual field wear: blouse, breeches, wraps and underwear, plus a couple of regulation, dirty OD shirts. All straps would be in place and buckled. All buttons buttoned. All laces laced. There'd be gloves on his hands. Helmet and goggles on his Yank head. Then, to make things more difficult, Berry always had loose change in every pocket. His watch, pocket variety, was with him. His pack of cigs in evidence; and a fountain pen was sure to be clipped in his blouse's breast pocket. This last wasn't fully military, but neither was Berry.

Thus dressed, Lieutenant Berry would take off, zoom his usual crazy zoom, and go out for altitude. It'd take some little time, but he'd crowd that Nieuport-27 up close to its best ceiling. That was pretty close to twenty thousand feet. Twenty thousand is pretty high now; and it was higher then. Only one out of every five or six thousand aviators has ever been to twenty thousand; for altitude is the dish of the few, and the brave. Up there the air feels mighty strange to the flying hand. You just don't seem to have a hold on anything.

But way up there, being just Berry, Berry would throttle low, take hands and feet off, and let her run. And how any man could do that is beyond understanding.

While she unwound herself in that twenty-thousand-foot falling leaf spin, Berry proceeded to remove that entire collection of wearing apparel. When the small ship was within three hundred feet of the hard old earth, Berry would get back on his controls. He'd redress the Nieuport-27's flight, then, at that low altitude, kick the small bus over on its back. Looking up, a newcomer would be surprised, and highly mortified, to see that Lieutenant Berry was as naked as at that moment, twenty years before, when the Berry family doctor had bounced him on the delivery table.

As he flew in that inverted position, for the few seconds a Nieuport-27 could be held upside down, the mortified onlooker saw that Berry's left arm held his entire wardrobe, neatly folded, with no loose ends flopping in the slipstream. Neat, the boy was. The Air Service should let a young fellow off for the day, after pulling such a job as that. But Berry'd start climbing again. Twenty thousand, or a little less, would be regained. Down he'd come in another free fall. Landing, Berry would be fully dressed, lighted cigaret in his mouth, and with all loose change intact in all pockets.

"Now that's what Old Man Berry's son calls work," might be his only remark. Or he might add, "She's one good ship, sergeant. Thanks for the service. If you run me to earth, in town, they'll be on me. Tell the crew that too."

So this was the Berry who sprang full fledged on the actual front. A better equipped pilot never joined any active pursuit squadron. He had heard all the stories and advice—over here there wasn't room for circus stuff; it was just one dive if you had the jump, one hard dive if the Jerry jumped you. But up to that time, no man or monkey had convinced him that acrobatic flying wasn't the thing. Nor had any man budged his belief that acrobatic flying could be used in the hottest spots of actual front-line combat.

As perfect a machine as he was, Lieutenant Berry had one handicap: he was Berry. His rep had arrived on the front long before he reported in person. But that always happened in the case of wild and willing birds. Still, if the boys expected to look up at any time and see the air full of the spectacle of Berry's taking off clothes or putting them on, they were disappointed. Because Berry never performed unless Berry really wanted Berry to do the particular stunt —for Berry. So he was just one of the flight, during his first few weeks on the

sector. He held up his own end of the patrol, but never tried to put on a show. Only three dog fights came his way during that period, but they *were* dog fights. And ships did go round and round; and Berry did get his tail filled with slugs in the second of those three scraps. What is more, Berry knew that if he hadn't been acrobatically good, he might never have lived to look back on any one of those three meetings with the fast and altogether too willing enemy.

At the end of the first two weeks, Berry began to feel like an old hand. No man was a new man for a very long period during that stage of the war; and if an active pilot lived to count his patrol time in weeks he was lucky. Or good. Or both.

There were guys like "Coupé Ike" Hall who seemed neither good nor lucky. Coupé Ike was the fellow who won fame in the A. E. F. by claiming that his motor stopped every time he tried to fire his guns. A Nieuport-27's ignition could be cut, for combat work, by pressing a coupé button on top the control stick. You just brought the thumb of your flying hand down on that button, and your motor quit firing till the thumb was lifted again. With a coupé such as that, a pilot could grab a good handful of cowling with his left hand, hold on like hell, and fly the old bus through the most brutal stunting imaginable. Well, the gun triggers were right there on the grip of the control stick too. So Coupé Ike's motor always blipped-blipped when he tried to fire his guns. The star bonehead was using the coupé button instead of the triggers. That slight mistake had been lucky for Germans more than a few times; for Coupé Ike, dumb as he was, seemed plenty brave. He could, and very often would, get on the enemy's tail. Only to have his motor cough, kick, stop and start. And he'd come back, call the armorer, and give that worthy the very devil. Or he'd call the motor macs and lay them out in lavender. The world was all wrong for Coupé Ike.

But the coupé stunt wasn't the only thing that filled Ike's flying time with horror. He had a way of getting messed up in messes. Time and again, hot for the kill, he'd quit his place in formation; then come darned close to putting the old crossfire on his own flightmates. That, of course, was a common happening in wartime flights. But it was a thing the rest of the mates couldn't learn to like. Coupé Ike Hall, explaining two such happenings within a single week, had insisted that he meant no harm.

"In other words, Hall," barked the flight leader, "you want us to go on believing that you're not working for Imperial Germany, eh? You say you're still one of the gang, have nothing against us, and hope we win the aviator's long white beard, what?"

The flight leader was the one who had been missed twice by Coupé Ike's ambitious dives and murderous tries. He had every reason on earth to be sore.

Strange to say, Berry and Coupé Ike struck up a friendship that was almost beyond belief. It was funny, then again it wasn't; for farm history is full of cases where smart horses have teamed up with stupid-looking old burrhead mules. The Berry-Ike Hall team was one dizzy team.

DURING the third week of Berry's stay on the front, Coupé Ike ran out of knowledge again. This time Berry almost got the works. And the flight leader yelled that this was the end.

"I'll be doubly damned if we're going to fight the enemy and Hall at one and the same time," he howled, when the flight had landed, minus one man who'd gone down in fire. He went over to where Berry was getting out of his ship. "Berry," he snapped, "make out a report on this. I've got to get rid of Hall before he gets rid of some of us. Come

on, let's get over to operations office and take care of this."

The flight leader was all steamed up, and rightly. Berry trailed along, not to make out that report, though. Berry went along to cool off the leader, then talk the thing over.

"Give him a chance, captain," Berry argued. "You can't tear down Ike's meat house like this. Ike's nothing more or less that a good backfield man carrying the ball toward the wrong goalposts. Guess he goes more or less loco, and all that, but he's a flying man. He's one of us. What if you or I were to be let down on a report? What if somebody put the well-known boot to us? There'd be a couple of broken hearts, captain, and you know it. How in hell can we think of pulling a man out of this branch if that man is willing to go ahead, especially when there's nothing petty about the guy?"

The flight leader stopped just outside operations office. "Got a cig, Berry?" he asked. "We'll forget it. What I need, Berry, is a couple of days in town. I've missed too many trucks to the city."

With that attended to, Berry asked the medical officer to look at his back. "Guess the old French itch is kind of bad today," he explained.

"H-m-m-m," the medical officer said, "if this is French itch, lieutenant, I'll have fish with whipped cream. Two slugs in the flesh. Where'd you collect them?"

"Out of thin air," Berry kidded. "Don't say a word about it. I mean that—don't mention this, be a good guy."

The medical officer worked and smiled. He shooed his sergeant away. "Mum's the word, lieutenant," he agreed. "But that boy is going to get you if you don't watch out. . . And I'll be damned if I don't like the fellow. Yes, sir, I think the world of him. I can't quite make him out, though."

That evening Berry and Coupé Ike went to town, met up with some of the outside-drinking mechanics, ran afoul of three M. P.'s, and left the latter badly beaten in a *cul-de-sac*, which is French for a dirty back alley. Then, long after taps, they met the flight leader who said he knew an Infantry captain who knew a place down near the river were some enlisted men said anybody could have a good time. It was with the rosy dawn that they came down the poplar-lined road that brought them back to the drome. Coupé Ike was ready to bet any part or all of that month's wages that he could put a Nieuport-28 down that road, under and between the trees, without rolling a wheel or tipping a wing.

Between that rosy-dawn hour and the first scheduled patrol, there was just time to snatch a bite of breakfast and clean up a bit. They had a swell start on the day ahead. While the big doings were on, men were hot; and a young fellow could fly all day on the stuff that he took aboard during the night. The mechanics might have to see that Berry and company were strapped into their seats; but what were mechanics for—surely not just for nut-twisting?

The squadron was using the Nieuport-28 at that time. The 28 was big brother to the Nieuport-27. Like the 27, the 28 was also powered by a rotary motor. And having a rotary, the 28 also had the coupé button on the joystick. But this new type of rotary motor was just about the worst engine of death that had ever been wished upon the pilot who sat behind it, not on the enemy pilot. They say that the German flyers were all for the 28's. They'd get the jump on a Yank, then hang off a bit, waiting to see if the old whirling-spray rotary wouldn't throw itself apart, burn the ship and kill the Yank. That's where the *monosoupape* rotary was at its best—tossing off cylinders and setting the ship on fire.

So seven Yanks strapped themselves into those Nieuport-28's and hoped that the contraptions wouldn't burn this time. And the seven took off and roared up

for quick altitude. The 28 was the ship that could get quick altitude, too. Also, to give it full credit, it was a fine flying ship, except for the fire hazard. Also it was the most beautiful wartime plane, bar none; and a Yank could fall in love with the slick-looking little bus.

So while the going was good it was very good; and this was a morning to make any flying man glad he was alive. There were clouds way up, near the sixteen or seventeen thousand foot level. But the rest of the sky was clear as a bell. In spite of all the ex-soldiers tell about French weather, French weather could be swell stuff. In any and all directions the rising flight could locate objects—towns, cities, hills, ridges, rivers—for fully fifty or sixty miles. All along the lines, Allied and German, there was movement and action.

But the old men in the flight knew that they must face that toughest of all hard ambushes: the ambush of clear skies. It's hard to watch the whole sphere, above, below and at all sides. Anything, in the line of attack, could be expected in such a sparkling dome. So, as they climbed and made things on the ground look small, there was that tense expectancy that rides with men always on guard.

Coupé Ike Hall flew just behind and above the leader, on the right wing of the V wedge. Berry was just above and behind Coupé's right wings. The other four ships were in the usual position of the habitual V formation. They flew close, making of the patrol more or less of a clubby contest. It takes a man's stuff to fly tight like that, with churning props ready to bite a nip out of your ship. If you can do it without breaking out in a sweat, you're jake. But if you don't care for the dish, and incline toward buck fever, then it's plain hell. Berry, of course, fattened on that feed. And strange to say, Coupé Ike Hall could fly 'em just as Scotch or close as the next one. And the rest of them were all there.

Ten thousand feet had been reached, put below, and they were pretty well down over the southeastern end of the patrol line. The climb went on, and at fourteen thousand they flew their turn and went over into enemy territory. The clouds, with the sun pouring through, were only a few thousand feet higher. Now the whole works was a mess of shadows. Shadows of near clouds crossing wings. Bad stuff, for a hostile plane between you and the sun will sometimes warn you that way. And now it was all warning. Clouds and shadows. More shadows, and always shifting. Men glancing back over shoulders, with that wondering stare in their goggled eyes. Men ready to touch and go. And a flight with Coupé Ike all set to dive and charge anything, bravely, with guns snapping and lots of crossfire, perhaps.

The flight leader, going deeper into the enemy country, made up his mind to try for still more ceiling. Get above those clouds, and get away from the shadows, if those clouds didn't go too high. He signaled for a loosening up of the flight. The planes spread out, nosed up into the clouds, and drilled through the slithering mists. Light, fluffy fleece blew off speeding wings like snow off the snout of a plow. Sun glistened. Ships ghosted. The unit rose and rose; and then fifteen thousand feet was on the altimeter. Then sixteen. Seventeen. And when the ships were churning eighteen thousand feet of thin air; the flight was in the clear. The top of the world belonged to them. Not another ship, or flight of ships, came to view. And the ground was missing too.

With the sun on the right, they went on and into enemy territory. The old joy and kick of top flying was upon them. They could relax and enjoy the next miles and minutes; till the time came to cut for home. Then, with the sun on left, there might be another kick coming, in finding a way down. Adventure went with that sort of top cruising.

By way of relaxing fully, Berry was flying barrel-rolls, in formation. That's good flying, but kind of nerve wracking for the other pilots, whose wingtips he was just missing. The flight leader out there in front and far enough below so that all six followers could look into his cockpit, was cruising with the joystick between his knees. And while so cruising he was jotting down notes in a small book. Banning, the man who flew opposite Coupé Ike, left of the leader, must have had a very fine-flying Nieuport. He was flying with both hands and feet off controls, standing in his pit, reaching ahead and polishing his windshield and guns with a handful of wool waste. The others of the flight lolled behind their controls and cheered the actors in this queer show. War seemed to be very fine stuff, at that exact minute—a flying minute when war and the top of the world seemed safe.

THEN a shadow came where no shadow should have been. The rear men saw that shadow first; for it came with the diving of a Fokker. And before a warning could be given, the shadow had swept ahead, crossing Berry's ship, then Coupé Ike's. The enemy ship, in that hard dive, turned things loose.

The flight leader seemed to wilt. His ship carried on. He had been sitting well back in his seat; so luckily, his limp body did not fall forward against the joystick.

More shadows were crossing more wings. More diving Fokkers. Then, for the first time, Berry was at a loss to know whether a man should dive or remain to go round and round.

Banning had gone. With the passing of that first hell-sent shadow, Banning had quit his clowning, flopped into his seat, dropped his nose, and stood on the rudder with full throttle on his motor. He was after the ship that had caused the shadow. But Berry, if he had hesitated, got his answer from Coupé Ike. That star bungler had gone mad.

No dive for Ike. Instead, he was flying as Berry never expected to see a man fly. Fishtailing, *veraging*, stalling, zooming, Coupé Ike was covering the cruising ship of the leader, the leader who had wanted to wash out Ike on a report. And, even as Berry snapped into action, more of those shadows were sweeping onward; and two of the diving enemy were trying for that lead ship. Coupé Ike Hall met them both.

How Ike wheeled that ship, and fired, Berry could never understand. But Ike did that impossible bit of flying, all the time keeping the leader covered, and at the same time bearing his guns on the first of the diving enemy ships. Between Berry and Coupé Ike, that enemy plane burst into flame. Then the second Fokker zoomed, and madly tried to turn right. Ike fired into that zoom; and the Fokker, nose down and spinning, fell away from the fight. As wild as ever, half standing in his pit, Coupé Ike zigzagged his flight, and carried on above the ghost ship of the leader. The bungler was dynamite.

By then Berry and the other three Yanks were in the center of a milling mess. Five Fokkers were still above the clouds, so at least eight of the enemy had been in the first dive. That was a pretty even deal, were it not for the fact that the German ship was a far better craft at that altitude. And the maneuverability of the Fokker was proving its worth now. But they were going round and round; and that fact must have boosted Berry's stock like the very devil.

Berry got his first enemy ship then and there; and he knocked that ship down while in acrobatic combat. He was flying on his back, snapping out of a *renversment*, when his gun sight framed the victim. One enemy ship! One up, for acrobatics; and they said the thing wasn't being done. Horse-

feathers! Berry wasn't up there for diving practice.

Coming out of that brush, and quick victory, Berry caught sight of Jack Poor, in No. 11, following two Fokkers down. They were just entering the clouds. One of those enemies had jammed guns, the other was covering the first's retreat, and Poor was seeing what he could do for himself. Berry wished him luck and might have followed, but just then he discovered that the remaining pair of enemies were cutting away from the dog fight. Those two were high-tailing down the sky, headed for Coupé Ike and the free-flying, ghosting flight leader's ship. And those two Fokkers had no opposition. Berry suddenly realized that two of his mates seemed to be missing. But the place was too busy for accurate count, and right now there was work out front.

Berry took up the chase. Coupé Ike and the other Nieuport were a mile down sky. The two Fokkers had almost half that distance cut down when Berry got under way. A mile of open sky isn't very much sky for ships that can knock out a few miles a minute. Berry hadn't really warmed up yet, and he knew he hadn't. And he was as hog-wild at Coupé Ike as he hit that good Nieuport-28 on the tail and tried to cut down that mile of space in nothing flat.

Berry saw Coupé Ike turn to meet the charge of two Fokkers. Again Ike was a flying lunatic. He was covering sky, he was everywhere. And—one Fokker got past Ike. Got between his maneuvering Nieuport and the Yank ship that still carried on with the dead, or unconscious, leader slouched in the cockpit.

Berry, getting closer now, wondered which condition that leader of theirs was in—dead or unconscious? It was a new situation. What could he, or Coupé Ike, do about it? Nothing. It would end when the flight leader's gasoline supply should become exhausted. A new line of thought flooded in on Berry, during those ages wherein his plane covered that mile of never-ending space. And the new thought had to do with flying time. He had ignored the passing of time. Now he reached in his pocket for that old-style watch of his. Six-thirty! Berry's stout Yank heart missed a few shots then. Six-thirty meant that they'd been birding about for more than an hour and a half. Another half hour and tanks would be next to empty. If they could cut off now, and head for the lines, they might get back out of enemy country. Enemy country! Where in that country were they? The sun was still on the right. That meant that the cruising ghost ship, with Coupé Ike and Berry following, had been running in deeper and deeper all the time. The front lines must have been far behind by then. The clouds below still blanketed the ground from view. The outlook was just about as tragic as an airman could picture.

Berry was now ready to pick a Fokker and do some fighting.

Coupé Ike, with that first Fokker passing him, was standing his ship on its tail. Berry, even with his own troubles, saw that zoom and split-S turn that went with Ike's great try; and Berry, right then and there, flattered himself that he knew how to pick a flying mate. Coupé Ike oozed out of that second turn, lowered his ship's nose, and drilled ahead close on the tail of the Fokker that was then within fifty yards of the leader.

Berry, just then, fired on the second enemy. But the angles of approach and attack were all wrong. Berry's burst of fire did little damage. And the Fokker was still in the game when Berry zoomed, went over the Fokker, and made a quick come-back turn. Again he came down on his mark; and it was taking all that Berry had, to maneuver and hold his own with that Fokker, at that great altitude. And time was paying out. Time, the only thing a man

has, was being eaten up as the life-giving gasoline was being hogged by the roaring, hellishly-wasteful *monosoupape* rotaries. Berry cursed those single-valved motors that literally tossed good gasoline all over the ruddy sky!

Coupé Ike's man missed his first rush on the ship out front. Ike had driven him out of that charge with a burst of fire that had holed the instrument board of the German ship. And quickly, wanting no more of that, the better-climbing Fokker had gone up in a zoom that put it in the clear. Pawing for more altitude, Coupé Ike's craft seemed to stand on its rudder and scratch thin air. Berry's man, in the meantime, had also pulled out; taking refuge in a climb. Maybe he'd join his mate higher; then they'd dive the Yanks in teamwork.

That wouldn't be so good.

Ike's Fokker man had worked a little ahead of the on-flying ghost ship. The Fokker was getting set to dive. Berry, trying for no more altitude, decided to go out front and be ready for that dive. He was directly above the flight leader's Nieuport when the Fokker started down.

IN A FLASH Coupé Ike reverted to form—shoot a ship, almost any ship. Ike was above and behind Berry. Ike came out of his climb, saw that the Fokker was diving, but failed to notice that Berry was coming in at a lower level.

And diving, Coupé Ike came with both guns pouring shot. His burst of fire was sure to miss the leader, but it potted Berry's bow. Snap! A whir-r-r-r and a shrill whistle; and Berry knew that his propeller had been shattered.

Another split second, with that motor whirling the splintered propeller at top speed, and Berry would have tons of vibration on his ship. There'd be a broken gas line, with raw fuel covering the whole ship. And there'd be fire aboard before Berry knew what had happened. Berry had only one choice. Cut his motor! Cut the ignition! Kill the thing.

Berry did that, but before he could kick his ship into a dive or a sideslip, he saw that his bus was due to collide with that of the flight leader. There was no way to miss the tangle. So Berry made up his mind to put those ships together as best he could. But if any part of his ship should come in contact with the lower ship's propeller, it would be the end. Another broken prop, then goodbye, with two ships and two Yanks going into the ground.

A moment of awful suspense came in there. Whether it was luck or the man knew acrobatics so well, Berry's wheels and landing gear missed the leader's prop. Those low-hanging parts of Berry's ship must have missed by a scant foot or so. They hit the upper wing, just ahead of the flight leader. Then, with the speed of the still-flying lower ship, Berry's dead Nieuport slipped back. The landing gear's spreader bar missed the leader's head, again by inches, and came to rest, jammed tightly, against and under the head pad of the cockpit. The stubbed-off propeller dug its way through the linen of the upper right wing, right in close to the joint where both wings were bolted together, at the center section of the ship. Digging in like that, the stout prop stub anchored the upper ship in place upon the back of the lower. And as long as power flight continued, without too rapid loss of altitude, the ships would remain that way.

But there was a sinking. A Nieuport was never meant for heavy-duty work. Still—the thought flashed through Berry's mind—he had seen a Nieuport-28 carry three men, back at Field 8, Issoudun; and the pilot of that ship reported that the little bus hadn't been overtaxed in doing the stunt. And she was carrying the load right now.

But Berry wasn't pondering about that. There were split seconds now for

rapid action. Any time now the double wreckage might fall from line of flight, out of all control. Knowing that, Berry tossed off his safety belts. Over the side he started to climb.

The slipstream of those planes, moving at close to one hundred miles per hour, tried to slap him back over the tail of his ship. But wingwalkers could handle that outside stuff, and so would Berry. It was a tight squeeze for a boy of his size but he forced himself down between the leading edge of his lower left wing and the trailing edge of the leader's upper left panel.

Berry got his feet on the lower wing of the bottom ship, in close to the fuselage. He reached in and cut the ignition. That killed off the speed and the hellish slipstream.

But in a shake, it sent the whole mess into a spin. But Berry could hold on in any kind of a spin, and with little effort and no fear. He worked now with no thought of the ship's whipping, falling motion or the crazy, reeling earth. There was a large-size job cut out for him. He had to get rid of that upper ship. First Berry thought: fly the whole mess over on its back and shake that top plane loose. Looking things over, Berry discovered that the stunt was out of the question; the tail of the top ship covered the controls of the lower craft in such a manner as to prevent full usage of those lower surfaces. Even so, Berry might have tried something desperate, worked the whole mess over upside down, and then shaken them apart. But Berry was too much of an airman for that. He might manage to get the works upside down, then have things stay that way, right to the ground. Ships had fallen that way before. And when ships come down like that, the pilots never tell about it—an upside-down ship is a rock.

Berry had expected the spin to help, too. But the thing had done no good. Those ships were stuck tight, and seemingly satisfied. The spin resolved itself into what airmen call a "flat" spin, the most hellish, controlless spin of them all. The nose isn't hard down, with tail surfaces high. Instead, the ship retains an almost even keel, yet spins and spins. That spin wasn't the sort that would throw the upper plane loose through centrifugal force. The weight of the top ship, so far aft, was the reason for the flat spin; and there was no hope of any change.

There was only one way to get rid of the load; and Berry knew the way. It called for work, via the old strong back method. Now, at best, a Nieuport-28's cockpit wasn't roomy. When Berry saw those three men ride one, back at Field 8, the two extra men sat out on the lower wings. But Berry knew that he had to crowd in with his leader, as best he could. And, swinging his right leg over the gunwale, Berry went in; and gave no part of his attention to anything beyond, or outside, those locked ships.

He looked at the leader closely. There was life there. He was sure of it, and glad. That made the work worth while, and even more necessary and urgent. The work went into the hardest kind of labor. Standing, Berry could reach up and put his hands on the motor end of the plane above. He did that. Then, with legs braced, Berry began to pull and haul. If he could force the two ships apart, the untangling might be accomplished without having the freed upper ship carry away the tail surfaces of the lower one. But it had to be done with all care, and the final tossing apart must come at the exact, right second. Berry made the second and the act meet, and he never remembered just how. He said that he pried and a ship flew right out of his hands. Made him laugh, he said. Never before had anybody heard of anybody throwing away a ship.

To sit on a mate and fly a pursuit plane is close work. But it can be done.

Berry forced his way to a sitting position, worked the rudder bar from under the leader's limp legs and feet, and gathered the joystick unto himself. Then he took his first good look at the surrounding sky. He was below the clouds. Coupé Ike and Banning were circling him. The altimeter read seven thousand feet. Man! there had been some falling done during the past minute or two!

Berry's next job was to start the motor. It would take a hard dive. Berry snapped the switch to "on." He shoved the nose groundward; and his own nose was right in the windshield. There was hardly room for stick motion. Five hundred feet of that dive ravelled out behind his straight-up tail, and the propeller was just beginning to show a lazy turning inclination. And when a thousand feet of space had been thrown away, the prop hadn't yet excited the motor enough to cause that hellborn rotary to try a shot or two.

Berry knew what was wrong: cylinders loaded, overloaded, with too-rich gas. Maybe the next thousand would clear the cylinders. Perhaps it wouldn't. Berry had seen young mechanics grow old trying to start rotary motors, and that under the best conditions. Also, he'd seen men try to dive them back to life, like this, and fail. But there were six thousand feet of altitude left to take nose-down the try.

At five thousand feet, Berry heard the first welcome shots snapping and coughing from that motor. She smoked and tossed back black clouds of stinking castor-gasoline fumes all over the immediate sky. And Berry gloried in that awful, welcome stink. When rotaries smell rancid like that, they were alive.

Berry lifted out of the dive. He nursed that motor a bit more. She cleared up. Then she ran as though she'd only been fooling. Berry again searched the sky for Coupé Ike and Banning. They were diving, too. A minute later and all three ships were grouped. Then, putting the sun on the left, they started back. It isn't on record that any one of the three consulted his watch to learn how much flying time remained on those tanks. But it is on record that they slid, tanks almost dry, into a front-line drome up in the English sector. And it was evening before the English surgeons brought the flight leader back to this world, saying that he'd pull through, if he didn't make a ruddy die of the thing.

After dark, Coupé Ike, Berry and Banning decided to drive back to the home drome and do some reporting. The leader was able to sit up and frame a few parting orders.

"Berry," he urged, "you make a report for me."

"O. K., captain," Berry agreed. "And I'll mention this man Ike Hall aplenty."

"What?" the leader almost barked, sick as he was. "Did that idiot cut in on this?"

"He did," Berry said. "He stuck a couple of ships together. I'll tell you all about it later."

Read about what Sergeant Investigator Bill Bailey found at a dangerous post on the Western Front in Theodore Fredenburgh's complete novelette NIGHT PATROL in the next issue.

No soldier knew his weapon as did these muckers. Hour upon hour for months, years, they had lived by the shovel. It was part of them.

PAT DOYLE AND POLACK JOE

By BORDEN CHASE

THE sand was alive. Gray, fine grained stuff that ran like water. It flowed from the bottom pockets of the shield in a sluggish tide. And the muckers fought it. Half naked, sweat-drenched and savage, they swept it away with steady cadence. Down went the shovels. Muscles writhed and shoulders twisted. A flash of steel and the sand streamed into the cars.

Back of the muck pile, Big Tim Martin leaned against the rounded wall of the tunnel. A scorching blast of pressure roared from the feed line close to his head. It shuddered against the roof, cut the heavy fog into swirling phantoms and lashed the backs of the muckers. It was as the breath of an approaching storm. The air was taut—heavy—pregnant with a violence about to be unleashed. Lightning glinted from the shovels in quick flashes. And found voice in the man-made thunder of the air. While through it, and above it sounded the sibilent swish of moving sand.

A sandhog left the group in the heading and walked up-tunnel. He was a thick-chested brute of a man. An aura of steam clung to his sweat glazed back. Wide-spread hands dangled close to his knees and swung slowly with each step. His eyes were blue, a bright blue that confirmed the promise of a heavy jaw. Pat Doyle lived for the day. He had

seen too many men die in the river tunnels. For him, there was no tomorrow.

He opened the valve in the water line, doused his head beneath the flow and drank deeply. He turned and a taunting grin creased his features as he found Big Tim's eyes upon him.

"How much time?" he asked.

The heading boss glanced at his watch.

"Ten minutes to go."

"Watch me kill a Polack," said Doyle and headed for the muck pile.

"Hold it, Doyle," called Big Tim. "I want to talk to you."

"Yeah?" said the mucker, turning.

"You've been looking for trouble with Polack Joe, and I know it," said the heading boss. "When it comes, I hope Joe splits your skull—it's coming to you for some of the stuff you've pulled. But get this. Lay off him while we're in the heading."

"You got us wrong, Tim. Polack and me are just kiddin'. I'm trying to make a sandhog of him, that's all. He's been in the air for more than ten years and he's still just a—a— Well, he's just a Polack, that's all."

The grin never left his face as he spoke. But Big Tim had seen men kill with a smile—beneath the river. And his years in "high air" had given him that intangible sense of premonition that comes to men who follow a dangerous trade. He knew the signs—the expectant glances of the gang as their eyes followed Polack Joe and Doyle—the hush that came when the two men quarreled—the bitter rivalry that drove these two muckers to titantic feats with the shovels—and above all, the thin lash that sounded in Doyle's laughter when it was directed at Polack Joe.

Big Tim watched closely as Doyle stopped beside a string of muck cars midway to the heading. They were empties, held in reserve and sent down to the pile as they were needed. Beneath each wheel, a wooden wedge held them from rolling down grade.

Doyle stepped to one side as a small electric locomotive drew a loaded car from the rail head. When the track was clear, the mucker knocked the wedges from beneath the forward empty. He put his shoulder to the rear and started it, then walked beside it with his hand on the rim.

It was part of the usual routine in the heading. But Big Tim suddenly sensed a definite purpose in Doyle's work. A mucker was standing between the rails at the far end of the track, his back toward the approaching car. And the heading boss recognized the narrow hunched shoulders of Polack Joe.

Big Tim leaped forward. Sudden rage tightened the line of his lips. He yelled a warning. But it was drowned by the noises of the heading. He yelled again. The car gathered speed and moved swiftly down grade. And at the end of the track, Polack Joe still leaned up on his shovel, resting.

Faster went the car. The rumble of the wheels was lost in the roar of air flowing from the feed line. It swayed as it pounded along the uneven track. And beside it, grinning, ran Pat Doyle.

It had covered half the distance to the heading when Doyle cupped a hand to his mouth.

"Look out, Polack!" he cried. *"Car's coming!"*

The mucker bending above the pile dropped his shovel and leaped aside. He twisted, drawing his legs beneath him, and landed face down in the muck. The heavy car crushed into the heap of sand, covering the spot where Polack Joe had stood.

"The Flyin' Polack!" Doyle's voice sounded above the roar of the air. He rocked forward, beating his palms against the floor boards, and bursts of Homeric laughter came from his throat.

It was wild laughter. It taunted. And sudden quiet gripped the men of the gang. They waited.

Big Tim crashed into the heading.

"Damn you, Pat!" he said and reached for Doyle. "You'll never pull a trick like that again. Not in my gang. You're through."

The mucker backed away, grinning. "Aw—I was only throwin' a scare into the Polack," he said. "Don't take it serious. It was a joke."

"Sure, Tim," said Polack Joe as he scrambled to his feet. "Patty—he don't mean to hurt me. He play like that."

He grinned and thumped Doyle's naked back with an open palm. Doyle laughed. And again Joe thumped. His hand rose a third time and the fist doubled as it fell. It landed just behind Doyle's left ear and the mucker pitched forward into the muck pile.

"See?" said Polack Joe and his lips were thin. "We play—only sometime we play rough, eh?"

Pat Doyle sprang erect. His hands went out to Joe's throat.

"You dirty Polack!" he cried. "I'll twist your neck!"

"Quit it," ordered Big Tim and stepped between them. "You asked for that, Pat. And it saved your job for you. Get busy on the muck—you, too, Polack."

"We'll finish it later, eh, Polack?" said Doyle.

"Yeah, Patty," said Joe. "Next time I break you neck—you bet."

The muckers grasped their shovels and Big Tim stepped back. He knew as did Polack Joe, there had been cold malice in Doyle's joke. Had the car hit Joe it would have meant a crushed leg—possibly a broken back. And Doyle's laugh would have been just as loud, as he called it an accident.

The hatred between the men had reached a climax on this job. Years ago Polack Joe had come from the coal mines of Pennsylvania with a shovel lashed to his traveling bag. The sandhogs had laughed at the scrawny, long armed miner. But Big Tim knew a man when he saw one. He put Polack Joe to work on the muck pile. The withering heat of the river tunnels and the steady drag of high air had been too much for Joe. He moved less sand than any man in the gang. The sandhogs laughed harder. And loud above the rest was the laugh of Pat Doyle.

Big Tim had waited and in two weeks Polack Joe grew used to the pressure. The heat melted a few pounds from his lean frame and made his ribs stick out like hoops. Then Joe found himself. He swung his heavy shovel faster and faster each shift. The muckers' laughter stopped. They cursed as they tore at the sand. But it was useless. Polack Joe left them behind. That lean, bony frame dipped and swooped at a pace none could equal. He raced them off their feet, filled two cars to their one, and grinned at their curses. The fame of Polack Joe grew. And the muckers acknowledged him the master.

But not Pat Doyle. From one tunnel to another across the face of the earth Pat Doyle had followed Polack Joe. It had been merely a game in the beginning. And the sandhogs still told of the first job these two had worked together. How Doyle had taken the shovels from the hands of two muckers and told them to rest—he'd do their bit. And how Polack Joe had matched him shovel for shovel, yard for yard. How Big Tim had given the miners extra helpers to feed sand to the rivals. And Gunga Sam, the huge Senegalese iron-boss, had driven his blacks. In the tunnel all must keep time. The iron segments must be bolted into a ring when the muck is cleared away. And the miners may not lag behind the muckers.

AND now beneath another river they had started the fight again. But it was no longer a game between the men. Hatred had grown stronger as the years passed. A bitterness had seized them.

Doyle's jokes were cruel, deadly. And his laughter was toned to an edged sharpness. To him, Polack Joe was an outsider—a foreigner. Doyle lived for the moment. His pay never got past the card tables or the bar of the nearest saloon. There were whispers of a wife who had left him and a child that had died. But the sandhogs never talked of those things—not to Pat Doyle. And when pictures of smiling youngsters were taken from grimy wallets and passed from hand to hand around the restaurant tables, they were never offered to Doyle. His laugh was too sharp when he said, "Yeah, a cute brat."

As for Polack Joe—he probably came closer to understanding Doyle than any man in the tunnel. But never were two men more unlike. Joe drank sparingly, and cards seemed to hold no interest for him. In the heading he was part of the gang, a mucker swinging a shovel. In the restaurant or in the hog house, he was a man apart, a man who sat in the corner and thumbed through letters written in a laborious scrawl, letters that carried foreign postmarks on the envelopes. He smiled at Doyle's taunts, refused to drink with him but never refused to fight. And gave Doyle mark for mark in their brawls.

For years, it had been only the watchful eye of Big Tim and his heavy fists that had kept the men apart. And now the giant heading boss knew the crisis had arrived. He moved closer to the muck pile. He saw Doyle push two men aside and brace himself beside a car. Glistening streams of sweat lost themselves in the thick mat of black hair that covered the mucker's chest. He hitched at his belt, spat on his hands and reached for a shovel. Half a cubic foot of sand spun through the air and smashed against Polack Joe's naked back.

"Come on, Polack," roared Doyle. "Let's you and me move some sand. A hundred dollars says I fill a car quicker than you. Is it a bet—or are you yellow?"

"So-o-o-o, Patty—you want race, eh?" said Joe slowly. He wiped his hands against his grimy trouser legs, tightened his belt and his gray eyes squinted. "Well, all right. I race you but I don't bet no hundred dollars."

"I knew you was yellow," said Doyle.

"I don't like that word, yellow, Patty. You don't say him no more to me. I don't bet—no. But for last time I race you."

"What you mean, last time?"

"Yeah, Patty—last time," said Joe. "Next shift I go miner."

The point of Doyle's shovel slipped to the sand. He straightened and amazement widened his eyes.

"Miner?" he said. "Why you goin' to be a miner?"

"Miner pays extra dollar," answered Joe and bent to his shovel.

It was true; the miners working before the shield received an additional dollar for each day's work. But Polack Joe and Doyle were not merely muckers, they were champions. And between them was a feud that had never been settled. Pride had held them to the shovel. And pride was worth more than a dollar or many dollars. "The fastest man on a shovel in the air"—that was the title Doyle wanted. Polack Joe stood between him and his goal. And now Joe was stepping aside for a few quickly spent dollars! Pat Doyle spat into the muck pile. It was a lie. The Polack was hiding something.

"What's your game?" he growled and his blade whipped into the sand.

Polack Joe said nothing. His shoulders were rising and falling in rhythmic motion. Sand thudded against the steel sides of the muck car. It flew in a steady stream. Across the heading, Doyle tore huge chunks from the pile and hurled them at the rising mound in the car. The muckers crowded close

about. Some shouted encouragement to one or the other; some offered bets quickly taken. Above, on the platform that bridged the center line of the tunnel, Gunga Sam and his gang of ironmen crowded to the edge and watched the struggle. But the eyes of the huge Senegalese iron-boss rested often upon Big Tim. And at times they clouded with doubt. Gunga, too, was old in the world beneath the river. He knew that death and hate ran close together.

Big Tim called to the motorman. The motor roared out of the mist, hooked onto the loaded cars and jerked them away. There had not been a second's difference in the loading time of either. Two empties were shunted to the track ends and the race kept on. *Thud—thud—thud—thud!* From each side of the muck pile sand lifted into the air and smashed against the cars. Not by a single shovelful did either man gain. Faster, always faster, they tore at the sand. And the men of the gang watched in silent wonder.

A grim smile twisted the corners of Polack Joe's mouth and his bony arms thrust deep with the shovel. He shook the sweat from his head and glanced at Doyle. Pat was scowling. His strokes were fast but they lacked snap. Suddenly he stopped. He looked across the muck pile to Joe. And he laughed. Then he turned to the heading boss.

"Hi, Tim," he called. "Is it right about Polack goin' mining?"

"Next shift," answered Big Tim.

"How about me goin', too?"

"You know I'm only short one miner," said Big Tim. "If you want to go mining I'll put you on soon as I get an opening."

"No good, Tim," said Doyle. "I rate that job same as Polack. How come he gets it?"

"Hey, what you say?" shouted Joe. He clambered over the muck pile and faced Doyle. "What you want, huh?"

"A miner's job," snapped Doyle. "If muckin' ain't good enough for you, it ain't for me, either."

"No—no, Patty. You must not do this thing,' said Joe. "That job is mine —yeah!"

Doyle shook his head. A stubborn smile twisted his lips. He pointed to the muck pile.

"You're supposed to be faster than me," he said. "I'll race you for the job."

Joe's head snapped back as though he had been struck. He stared at Doyle with narrowed eyes. He knew there was trickery in the mucker's offer. Twice his mouth opened and he seemed about to speak. Then he turned to Big Tim.

"I don't race," he said. "But that is my job."

"The devil you say!" roared Doyle. "'Tis mine as much as yours." He, too, turned to the heading boss. "I want it and I'm willin' to race for it. What say you, Tim?"

Big Tim turned his back. He walked across the heading and sat upon the bumper of an empty muck car. This was no time for a hasty decision. He had been surprised when Joe came to him before the shift and asked to go mining. Frank Webber, one of the miners, was moving on—a tunnel had started in England. And Polack Joe wanted his job. He had offered no explanation but Big Tim had expected none. Joe, like others of his race, was close mouthed. Tim had agreed, but expected trouble.

It was Big Tim's way to let the men earn their jobs. Doyle's offer to race was in keeping with the rule of the tunnel. Joe's refusal had forced the decision upon the heading boss. Doyle's reason for wanting the job was clear. He had never accepted the fact that Polack Joe was a better man on the shovel. He was a gambler and to him, each shift was a new deal. This, or the next might be the one, and he refused to let Joe quit, a winner.

BUT Big Tim had given his word. He frowned and ran a troubled hand across his chin. The clang of steel on steel lifted him to his feet. Across the heading bright flashes of light streaked from two upraised shovels. Above the thunder of the incoming air rose the shouts of the raging muckers. Metal rasped against metal and through the twisting spirals of fog Big Tim saw two half naked men leaping and twisting.

Polack Joe and Pat Doyle were having it out with shovels.

The muckers had formed a circle—watching—silent. Joe crouched beside the muck pile, the blade of his shovel held level with his eyes. His left hand grasped the shaft and his right was clenched about the handle. His legs tensed. The blade of the shovel lashed forward. The edge, razor sharp from constant contact with the sand, streaked toward Doyle's throat. The Irishman lifted his blade and its tip deflected the thrust. It swished past. Down went Doyle's point. His short jab to Polack Joe's stomach landed against a wooden handle. The weight of the stroke bit deeply into the hickory. Again the shovels whirled. Up went the blades and met crashing in the air. Sparks flew from the steel.

It was bayonet play—vicious—deadly. But no soldier knew his weapon as did these muckers. Hour upon hour for months, years, they had lived by the shovel. It was part of them. Their fingers had grown bent to the round of the shaft. The blades followed their every thought. Crouched beneath the edge of the iron gang's platform, they waited. Big Tim leaped across the heading. He shouted. But neither man moved his head a fraction of an inch. Each stood facing the other, shovel ready for thrust or parry. It was death to step between them and Big Tim knew it. His own back carried the blue scars of a shovel fight.

His hands closed upon a pick handle. He stood irresolute. To beat down the blade of one meant a lightning thrust from the other. He waited.

Slowly the men circled in the lull that comes in every battle just before the final mad onslaught. Doyle's lips drew back. A thin laugh broke the stillness. Polack Joe moved warily forward. His shovel lifted shoulder high. Doyle's followed. Joe's point whipped to the right. His left hand slid along the shaft and the blade swung in a screaming arc. It flashed on a line with Pat's throat. Doyle bent at the knees. The knife edge lifted his hat. Up came Doyle's point. It ripped across Joe's naked chest. A crimson stream followed it. The fitful gleam of the tunnel lights danced in the spreading stain. The mucker staggered backward. Above him the iron men stared in horrid fascination.

Up into the air whirled Doyle's shovel. Both hands gripped tightly on the handle turning the cutting edge downward. It hung momentarily at the peak of the stroke.

"*Now!* Get it, Gunga!" roared Big Tim.

A black arm streaked down from the platform. Vise-like fingers gripped the shaft of Doyle's shovel. Gunga Sam heaved. Clutching the shovel with an unbreakable grip, the mucker was swung from his feet.

Polack Joe sprang forward. Blood poured from his chest. It twisted down his arms and dripped into the sand. His eyes were wild. His teeth showed through backdrawn lips. The point of his shovel lifted and his shoulders twisted. He thrust forward.

The pick handle spun through the air. Driven with all the strength of Big Tim's mighty shoulders, it smashed against the blade of Joe's shovel and tore it from his hands. Big Tim's fist thudded against the mucker's jaw. Polack Joe crumpled.

"Nice work, Gunga," said Big Tim as he looked up toward the platform.

The iron boss had caught Doyle's wrists and the powerful mucker swung helpless, his feet clearing the floor. His face was contorted with rage and he screamed curses at his captor.

"Let him down," said Big Tim.

Gunga Sam released his grip. Doyle landed cat-like on all fours. He scrambled erect. And was met by the same punishing fist that had felled Polack Joe. He pitched forward onto the muck pile beside his antagonist.

"Douse them with the hose," growled Big Tim. "Here's the new gang. We don't want a lot of questions."

BIG TIM set his shoulder to the man-lock door. He glanced at the men ranged along the two benches. They were silent. And that was bad. It meant that yesterday's fight between Polack Joe and Pat Doyle had not been forgotten. The burly Irishman was seated at the far end of the lock. About him were his friends. Facing them were Polack Joe and his followers. It was an armed truce that might flare into fight any moment. Big Tim frowned as he nodded to the lock tender.

Air screamed in through the valve. With it came the withering heat of the tunnel heading. Five pounds—ten—the sandhogs pinched their noses and blew to equalize the head pressure—twenty—thirty pounds and the inner door groaned. It opened. And Big Tim followed his divided gang down tunnel.

"Come here, Pat," he called. "I've something to tell you."

"And I've something to ask you,' said Doyle as he walked beside the heading boss.

"What is it?"

"Does Polack go minin'?"

"He does,' said Big Tim.

"Then get another mucker," growled Doyle. "I'm through after this shift."

"Have it your way, Pat. But if you'll listen—"

"Listen, be damned! I'll not work for a man who puts a yellow-bellied son—"

Doyle had raised his voice to carry above the roar of the air. Polack Joe whirled about. He leaped at Doyle.

"You lie!" he cried. "I am no yellow!"

Big Tim brushed him aside. Then turned and gripped Doyle's throat in one huge paw. He shook. And the mucker's teeth clicked.

"So help me God," he roared. "If you two start anything this shift I'll crack your skulls. For ten years you've tried to murder each other but I'll be damned if you'll do it while you're in my gang."

"I am no yellow!" screamed Joe.

"I don't care if you're bright green!" roared Big Tim. "And you, Doyle—you're thick—thick, do you hear me? You've got a head like a rock!"

"I'll kill me a Polack before the day is out," said Doyle as he rubbed his throat.

They stepped into the heading and Polack Joe climbed the flanges of the iron. With the other miners of the gang he entered the upper center pocket of the shield and stripped to the waist. Wide pieces of adhesive tape covered his chest and at the edges the skin was an angry red. He turned, glanced down at the muck pile and spat.

Big Tim spoke a few words to the heading boss whose gang had been relieved and climbed to the platform. He entered the shield. The face had been breasted down and the miners were bracing it, preparing for a thirty inch advance of the shield. Red Johnson, the shield driver, was setting the spindles that controlled the huge hydraulic jacks. He had ordered additional pressure from the power house and watched the guage as the pointer rose to 6,000.

"All set?" asked Big Tim.

"Yes," said Red. "The miners ain't

finished but I want to be ready to go."

"How's it look?"

"Same as yesterday. Gray sand, and gravel, above it. Not so good, Tim. I'll be glad when we get further along."

"So will I," said Big Tim and turned to the men working in front of the shield. "Come on, miners—make it fast."

"Don't blame them for bein' slow," called Pat Doyle from the muck pile. "Polack's probably scared the river'll drop in his lap. He's shakin' so he can't hold a shovel."

BIG TIM said nothing. His face was grim as he climbed to the bottom and headed for Doyle. He had taken but a few steps when from the upper pockets of the shield came the crash of splintered timbers.

"She's goin'!" screamed Red. "The face is crackin'!"

For a moment there was a silence. The muckers stood motionless—shovels held rigidly. The iron gang hung frozen to their wrenches. Nothing was heard but the dull roar of the air pouring from the feed line.

Again came the tearing sound of tortured wood. And through it the slither of sand.

"Shove!" roared Big Tim. "Open 'er up, Red. Shove that shield!"

The shield driver twisted the spindles. A mighty trembling shook the tunnel walls. The pistons of the hydraulic jacks thrust slowly against the last ring of iron. The shield moved forward. It ground into the shifting sand, crumbling the upper breast boards like match wood. The air screamed through the face. Men shouted.

A miner sprang from the upper pocket. He landed in the bottom and scrambled across the muck pile.

"The whole face is slidin'!" he yelled.

Crouched before the spindle blocks, the shield driver methodically released one jack after another. Thousands of tons of hydraulic pressure forced the steel cylinder ever deeper into the river bed. The curving hood ground forward. From beneath it streamed the sand. It poured through the pockets and cascaded down into the bottom.

The gang wavered. The shield might choke the flow, pack it tightly and prevent a blow. But if the pistons reached the end of their stroke before this happened—the heading was lost. The air would blast through the face and the river would be upon them.

Another miner leaped to the bottom. The shield driver followed him. Sand poured a Niagara upon their shoulders. They fought through it and joined the gang.

"She stop a little!" A voice sounded from the center pocket. The naked shoulders of Polack Joe were framed in the opening. His arms waved. Sand swirled about his hips.

"You wanted to be a miner," howled Pat Doyle. His laugh was savage and he glared up at Polack Joe. "How d'you like it?"

"Jump!" cried Big Tim. "Get out of there, Joe! It's goin—behind you, Joe. It's going!"

The warning came too late. A surging flood of sand deluged through the center pocket. Polack Joe's arms threshed madly. The sand crushed him — crumpled him — flowed over and around him. It poured down upon the tunnel floor, forming a steadily growing pile at the base of the shield. A hand broke through the flood. It clawed upward—grasping. Polack Joe's head jerked into sight.

"A-a-a-ah, God! Anna—Anna—I go! Anna, Patty—my—"

The sand poured over him. The shield ground on.

Big Tim leaped across the muck pile. He seized a shovel and sprang to the center pocket. Suddenly the gray tor-

rent ceased. The final thrust of the shield had stopped it. Big Tim braced himself on widespread legs. The shovel bit deep.

A man hurled himself into the pocket. It was Pat Doyle.

"One side, Tim!" he roared and his lips were creased in a smile. "The Polack was callin' me!"

"You! You!" yelled the heading boss. "He was calling goodbye to his wife and kid."

There was room for but one man to work in the pocket. The steel walls were but four feet apart. No room even for a full armed stroke with a shovel. And the sand had left little clearance beneath the roof.

Big Tim twisted to throw his first shovelful of sand down to the tunnel bottom. The handle was wrenched from his hands. The black browed Irishman forced his way forward, pushing, crowding Big Tim from the pocket.

"His kid—what kid?" screamed Doyle as the shovel sank into the sand.

Big Tim slid from the pocket. The flashing blade was sweeping the sand away in mighty strokes. The air was gray with it.

"His first," yelled the heading boss. "Two days ago—that's why he's mining—and he named it after you—damn you!"

A wild cry sounded from the pocket. Doyle's shoulders twisted and heaved in frenzied jerks. The blade of the shovel blurred as it rose and fell. A fountain of sand leaped from the shield. Pat Doyle was swinging a shovel as none but he and one other could. A champion was moving sand.

"Careful you don't start it flowing again," called Big Tim from the muck pile. "Don't go too deep, Pat. I'm afraid he's gone anyway."

"T'hell with you. Go—go if you're scared,' screamed Doyle between thrusts of the shovel. "I'll get him—or bring in the river."

There was a murmur from the gang. "Bring in the river?" The sliding pile of muck that covered Polack Joe was all that held the air in check. Above it was the river, waiting to surge into the tunnel. And gradually the level of the sand in the pocket was lowered. The gang tensed. Their eyes held to Doyle.

The mucker was buried to the knees as new sand slid down from beneath the hood to take the place of that he had removed. He tore at it with slashing strokes. His shoulders writhed. The heavy mat of hair upon his chest was sodden with muck. Breath broke from his throat in great sobs. Sweat poured down his face—carried sand into his eyes—blinded him. Still he fought on.

"Holy Mother—I've reached him," he cried as the point bit into flesh.

He cast the shovel aside. His arms plunged into the sand. He dug with his hands, thrusting the sand back between his legs. His fingers touched something solid. Deeper went the arms. His hand clutched an ear—a tuft of hair. He jerked. Straining backward, heaving against the pull of the sand, he lifted.

Up came the head of Polack Joe. Sand filled his eyes, his ears—his mouth was stuffed with it. Again Doyle lifted. He slipped his hands beneath Joe's shoulders and dragged him headlong from the pocket. Together they rolled down the slanting pile of sand to the tunnel bottom.

The gang crowded forward. Big Tim looked once. Then turned to Doyle.

"He's through," he said.

"Through, be damned!" screamed Pat.

He threw himself beside Polack Joe. His fingers clawed at the sand filled mouth. He cleared it. Then leaned and put his lips to those of Joe. He drew the choking sand from the miner's mouth. And forced air into his lungs.

"Water!" he cried. "Water—you gapin' idiots!"

He rolled Joe onto his stomach, straddled him and his huge paws spanned the

prostrate man's back. He thrust forward. Again and again he rocked backward and forward, timing his strokes with the action of Joe's lungs.

Big Tim was silent. The gang crowded close about. One man held the water hose in readiness.

"Wha—what—you do?" gasped Polack Joe at length.

"*Got him!*" roared Doyle. "*I got him back!*"

The sandhogs yelled. They leaped madly about. Big Tim lifted Polack Joe and held him cradled in his arms. Doyle grinned, swayed slightly and his legs buckled. He sat weakly upon the muck pile.

Again he laughed, but there was joy in the laughter.

Big Tim reached for the hose. He washed Joe's face and held the spout to the miner's lips. Joe drank and coughed. The heading boss twisted the hose and doused Doyle.

"Stop it—you ape," cried the mucker. "I'm all right. I want a word with that Polack."

"What you want, Patty?" asked Joe weakly.

"Is it true? Did you—that kid's name—"

"Yeah. Patty, that's him—like—you," said Polack Joe.

"You want him to be like me?"

"Sure, a damn good man—like you."

"A damn good man," Doyle repeated the words slowly. And wonder was in his eyes. Again he played with the words, rolled them slowly from his tongue, whispered them. "A damned good man."

"You bet," said Joe. "Damn near so good as me."

Big Tim's hand thudded against Doyle's chest as the mucker sprang erect. His iron fingers closed in the mat of hair and held the raging mucker at arm's length. Doyle's face was livid.

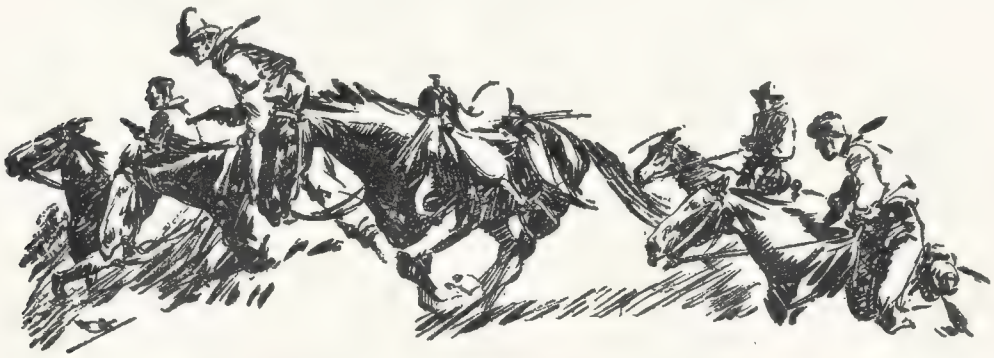
"Stand aside, Tim!" he screamed. "Did you hear what he said? *Nearly* as good, the dirty— Damn the dirty, no-good— Stand aside, I say!"

But Big Tim seemed rooted to the tunnel floor.

"Two miners turned their backs when the face crumpled," he said. "There'll be two new men working in their places next shift. I promised you a miner's job, Doyle. Do you want it?"

There was a thin edge to Doyle's laugh.

"Want it?" he roared. "By God, I demand it! And we'll see who's the better man."



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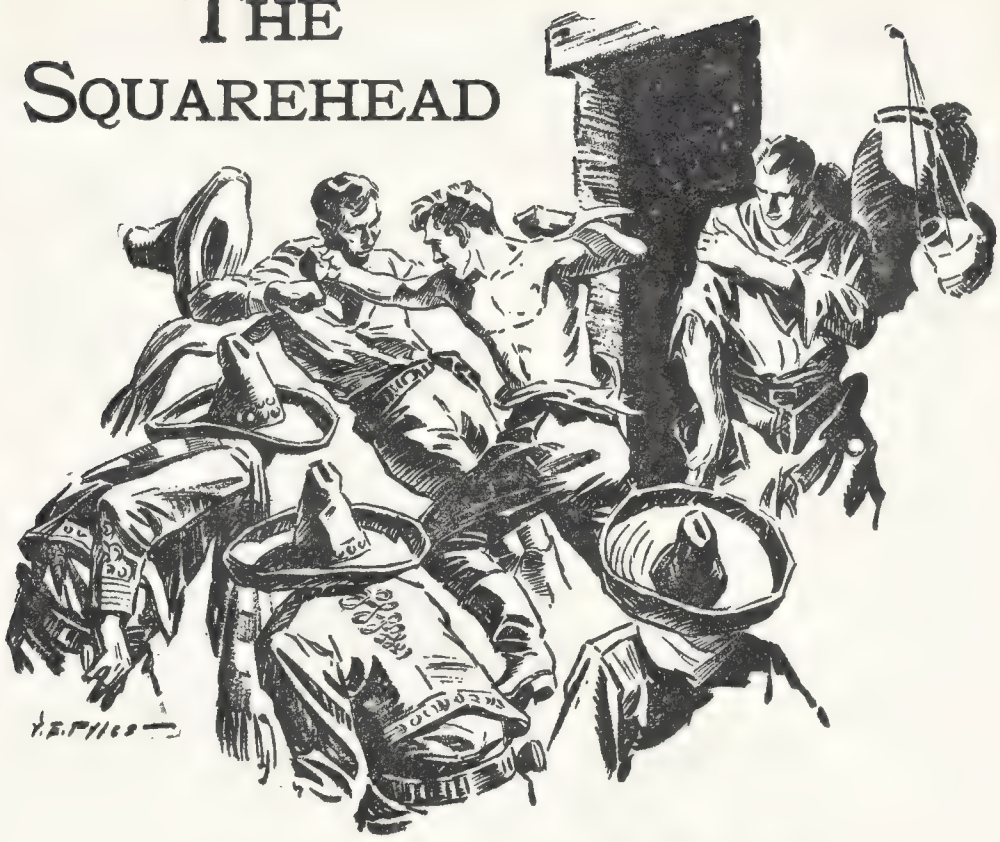
THE SQUAREHEAD



Squarehead was bellowing, wild with berserk rage.

By WALT COBURN

IF THE man had a real name, nobody ever took the trouble to learn it. The Old Man called him Squarehead.

The Cross L round-up had worked across the Capitans and over into the cactus cursed breaks of the Sangre. For better than five weeks the Old Man had led his cowpunchers on heartbreaking, temper-twisting, horse-killing circles, throwing cattle back beyond the long reach of the rebel troops that were doing their best, in the spirit of more or less misguided patriotism, to make Chihuahua unsafe for the gringo.

They pulled back to the headquarters ranch on Pulpit Creek, the Old Man riding in the lead of the pack train. There was a tall, flax haired, blue eyed gent in bib overalls and a clean cotton shirt, standing there in the doorway of the big adobe house.

"Where's Ygenio?" The Old Man was inquiring about the Mexican pump tender.

The big Swede in the doorway grinned and pointed to a mound of earth beyond the pump house. There was a wooden cross at one end of the mound.

The Old Man looked hard at the grave, then at the big Swede.

"When did he die?"

"I come along about month ago. He's dead then."

The Old Man didn't need anybody to tell him how Ygenio had died. A bunch of renegade rebels from Pedro Salazar's outfit. A rifle shot.

"Who's bin tending the pump?" The Old Man could hear the chug-chug of the gas engine as it pumped water into the tanks. Water, down in that country, is the biggest problem, next to renegade rustlers, that the cowman must contend with. Thousands of cattle and a remuda of horses depended on that one-lunged gas engine for water.

"I run the pump," said the big Swede.

"You savvy gas engines?" It was a silly question. Any human that could keep that erratic pump going was a mechanical genius.

"Yah." Any other man would have spent part of half an hour telling of the grief he'd had with that balky engine. But the big Swede's only comment was that "Yah."

The Old Man let it go at that. He liked men with guts and he had no time for a whiner. He turned away from the grinning Swede and began unsaddling so that the man wouldn't see how tickled he was. He never spoiled a good man with praise.

"How many for supper?" asked the Swede, rubbing the calloused sole of one bare foot across a flea bitten shin.

"Huh? About a dozen, all told."

The Old Man turned his horse loose and unsnapped his chaps. He was thinking about getting the flivver buckboard started. His family, up in Nogales, would be expecting him home. His wife and the kids would be worried. They always worried when he came down to the ranch. He was thinking how good a hot bath and a shave and clean clothes would feel. So he didn't pay much attention to what the Swede said.

The boys got in an hour later. The Old Man was tinkering with the flivver's motor.

The round-up cook had unloaded his dutch ovens and was starting the fire when the big Swede, a floursack apron tied around his middle, called them to supper. The Old Man wiped the grease off his hands and grinned. He was beginning to like that big, simple looking Squarehead.

He liked him better when he sat down to the table. A table that was scrubbed spotless, there in the house that was as neat and clean as any woman could have made it. And on the table were big pans filled with lettuce and radishes and green onions.

"Where the hell did this garden truck come from?" the Old Man asked.

"I find some seeds and make little garden."

That soil down in Mexico will grow anything if it gets water. But nobody had ever taken the trouble to plant a garden. Probably because a garden can't be planted from horseback. Cowpunchers are mostly proud about any work that can't be done with a rope or branding iron. Just ask any old cowpuncher if he knows how to milk a cow. He'll tell you that only dairy hands milk cows.

"Squarehead," said the Old Man, "this is a damn' good meal. That pumpkin pie was the real McCoy."

"Yah. Make him from carrots."

That tickled the Old Man. The boys hadn't seen him grin like that in three weeks. He'd cussed 'em and worked their hearts out these past weeks, but he'd worked himself harder than any of them. Dust and mud and cactus and heat and bad water and leg weary horses and wild cattle. Night guards and stampedes. Trailing sore footed cows and played-out calves. Daylight till dark and a two hour night guard. Beans and beef and bread and black coffee. Skinned up men and scarred horses. Never knowing when they'd be forced into a scrap with Salazar's men. Bearded faces gaunt and sun baked. Eyes bloodshot from wind and dust. Levi overalls worn threadbare. Hands and faces ripped by catclaw and mesquite. Nerves rubbed raw. Working every day in a country that the devil had stood on end. Risking a broken neck each time you slid

a horse down some slant in the wake of a bunch of cattle that were wild as mountain sheep. Spitting in the devil's eye. And now they sat down to a meal trimmed with fresh vegetables and pumpkin pie, made out of carrots by a big barefooted Squarehead.

So Squarehead grinned his way into the hearts of the Cross L cowpunchers. Just a big, simple-hearted Swede who had the knack for gas engines and gardening. Squarehead became a part of the outfit. A part of the drab, sun baked, wind swept, rain drenched lonesomeness.

Tending the pump was even worse than cow punching. It offered nothing by way of excitement. Squarehead tinkered with the gas engine, humming some native song or talking Scandinavian to it. He sat in the meagre shade and watched the gaunt cattle come in to water. He cooked his three meals a day, kept the house clean, mended the corrals, and whittled odd figures from bits of wood. His wood carving was, in a way, more than clever. There was, for instance, that carved figure of the crucified Christ, inside a beer bottle.

He talked with the barest perceptible accent and sometimes used words that puzzled the cowpunchers. He read everything from the Bible to the huge mail order catalogs. He went barefooted or wore big wooden shoes in the house. Outside he wore bullhide sandals like those the peons wore. He always had a small wad of Copenhagen snuff tucked in under his lower lip. Perhaps he was a little queer in the head. Sheepherders are apt to get a little bit queer and Squarehead had been a sheepherder in Wyoming or Montana or somewhere.

SQUAREHEAD had been at the ranch for several months when the Old Man sent Butch Riley down there with thirty head of steel-dust broncs. Butch was the best bronc peeler along the border and made good money following the contests at Cheyenne, Pendleton and Calgary. He was one of the few contest riders that knows how to gentle a colt. A top hand, Butch Riley, for all his fancy rig and his loud clothes and his whisky drinking and fighting. He made good money and spent it with both hands.

When a horse was bad, he bucked it out of the animal. Mostly, he handled 'em easy and when he turned over a string of broncs, the next man could rope off him or work cattle with him or roll a cigarette without having to steal his tobacco and papers. And that's saying a lot for a bronc twister.

Butch Riley was the type of cowboy that kids and women picture in their minds when they read tales of the romantic riders of the big open spaces. Tall, wide-shouldered, lean-flanked, graceful on a horse and light on his feet as a pugilist. Straight-featured, clean shaven, always dressed as the kids and women expect a cowboy to be dressed.

His California pants were foxed with white buckskin. His hat was big and cream colored and the best that John B. could make. His boots were glove fitting, fancy-topped, with built-up heels. His shirts were gaudy and made of silk or excellent flannel. His gun was a fancy, white handled Colt. When in town or when he went "girling," he used a silver mounted saddle that he had won at Cheyenne. The bridle was worth more than a hundred dollars. Pendleton had donated his chaps and heavy silver-mounted spurs.

Even in his Levis and jumper and a battered old hat, Butch Riley outclassed the other boys. He had an arrogant, devil-be-damned swagger.

Squarehead was alone at the ranch when Butch got there with his string of broncs and two Mexican helpers. The other boys had gone back into the hills, range-branding mavericks. The

Old Man was in Nogales for a few weeks of rest.

Squarehead watched the newcomer with eyes that were wide and very blue. Butch was decked out in his town clothes and seemed to play to his one man audience with the same graceful, half-contemptuous arrogance that was his contest manner. Squarehead was as a man in a trance. To his simple mind, this gay rider was akin to a god.

In spite of his clothes and his fame as a contest man, Butch Riley was very human. When he slid his bed from the pack mule, he brought out a bottle and offered the awed Squarehead a drink. Squarehead, honored by the invitation, swallowed a mouthful, then choked and sputtered. Raw tequila is not exactly a drink for amateurs. It is like cayenne-pepper and alcohol, made from the juice of cactus. Butch Riley drank it like water.

He grinned at Squarehead, who had accidentally swallowed a fresh bait of snuff with the tequila. In a few minutes the big pump tender was vomiting. Butch grinned a lot, but he wasn't unkind. He led Squarehead into the house and made him lie down till he felt better.

So began the friendship of the two men. Squarehead, the simple, phlegmatic, good-natured pump tender. Butch Riley, the magnificent champion and idol of the contest world. It was not unlike the loyalty of a faithful dog for its master. And while Butch basked grandly in the sunlight of the simple adoration, it is only fair to him to say that he treated Squarehead decently.

A week or two later old Lorenzo Covis, the horse wrangler, moved his family down from Nogales to the adobe shacks below the main house. Time had been when the ranch was quite an imposing place, owned by one of the Diaz supporters under an old grant. But the revolutions had wiped out the Mexican owners, who had fallen before firing squads or fled to exile. There remained the main dwelling, a one storied adobe of several rooms built around a spacious patio. Beyond, the crumbling adobe houses that had once quartered the families of the major domo and the vaqueros and mozos.

Old Lorenzo had been a captain or a major under Pancho Villa. A tall, straight-backed, military man with snowy mustache and hair and deepset black eyes that peered from under bushy brows. His left hand was useless and horribly scarred. Grim evidence of torture at the hands of some enemy army officer. He had lost all four sons in the wars of Mexico. There remained his wife and a small son, and one daughter. Another daughter had died a cripple. Some marauding renegade soldier, crazed with marijuana, had broken her back when she was a baby. Two of Lorenzo Covis' sons had died that day defending their women.

There was, in the dark eyes of old Lorenzo, the ever lurking flame that gave one to understand that he had not forgotten, that some day he hoped to face that man who had killed his sons and raped his wife and made a cripple of his baby girl who later died.

The other daughter was a slender, almost beautiful girl of eighteen. She showed, to a marked extent, the Castilian blood that had been her father's father's blood. Straight, lithe, with fair skin and large brown eyes heavily fringed with jet lashes. Hair as black and sleek as a crow's wing. Red lips, white, perfect teeth, a low, throaty voice that blended with velvet-like smoothness to the strumming of her guitar. That was Carmelita Covis.

"God!" said Butch Riley, when he saw her go past the corrals, riding a roan mule. "God!"

And that evening he shaved and put on his best clothes and made some excuse to Squarehead about seeing Lorenzo regarding the horses. He did not get

back to the main house till almost midnight. Squarehead heard the musical tinkle of his silver spurs as Butch slipped in, but he feigned sleep.

Squarehead, from the kitchen doorway, had also noted the passing of Carmelita Covis. He had seen the girl, astride the roan mule, dust powerdering her olive skin and her scarlet mantilla. She rode a Mexican saddle with a silver crusted pommel as big as a dinner plate. Sandaled feet tucked in homemade tapaderos. Slender brown legs, bare and round and shapely, under a cheap little black skirt. She had looked at Squarehead and flashed him a quick smile as she rode past with her father and a small brother who clung behind her saddle, his grimy little hands holding to her jacket. The mother came behind, driving a span of mules hitched to a democrat wagon piled high with household goods.

That girl's smile had sent Squarehead's blood pounding through his veins. He had not returned her greeting. Stupidly, red to the roots of his flax colored hair, he stood there and watched her go past. Old Lorenzo had ridden up and bowed gravely. He spoke to Squarehead in Mexican. The big Swede shook his head and spoke the only two native words in his vocabulary.

"No sabe."

Lorenzo nodded and rode over to the corrals where Butch Riley sat on the top log, rolling a cigarette. Butch spoke Mexican like a native. He had directed Lorenzo to the adobe cabins. Then he had saddled a big sorrel bronc and bucked him past where the Covis family was moving into their new quarters. And as the big sorrel pitched and twisted, Butch had turned his head sideways and grinned over towards where Carmelita Covis stood, her bare arms loaded with bundles of blankets and cooking pots. And when supper was over, Butch had shaved and dressed up and left Squarehead alone while he went over to "see old Lorenzo about them horses over on Pinal Mesa."

Squarehead, his face still hot from pulsing blood, had done the dishes and sat in the doorway until the moon came out. From the adobe cabins came the strumming of a Spanish guitar and a deep, throaty, liquid voice, the voice of Carmelita Covis singing a Mexican love song. Squarehead did not know the words of the song but somehow he knew that it was a song of love and that the girl was singing it for Butch Riley. A stony, taut expression pulled the muscles of the Swede's face, taking away his smile. His hands, big and red and powerful, knotted in his lap. The blue eyes, a little squinted now, stared off into the moonlit night.

A man's laugh drifted out of the music. There was an eager tremor in that laugh. Squarehead felt that tremor and his nostrils quivered like those of an animal. For after all, the big Swede was an animal, big and strong and superbly framed. Son of a Viking ancestry, with blood that had been the blood of bellowing, fighting Norsemen. Warriors, adventurers, lovers. Though probably Squarehead knew little enough about Lief the Lucky, Eric the Red, and Norse blood.

Generations of hard labor in the fields had subdued the fighting heart and the wanderlust. He was just Squarehead, who had a knack for farming and machinery and was perhaps a little off in the head. Still he sensed that mating of a girl's song and a man's laugh and it was a long time before his hands unclenched and his eyes lost their hard glitter that was like the green of the North Sea when the sun is cold.

There was a look of dumb misery in his face as he rose and went back inside the house and shut the door so that he could not hear. His huge shoulders sagged. He muttered under his breath as he washed his face and hands and

feet and went to bed. And when Butch came in, Squarehead feigned sleep.

BUTCH RILEY and old Lorenzo had to go over to Pinal Mesa the next day after some horses. Squarehead was left alone. He had finished his morning chores and was sitting in the shade whittling when the lithe figure of Carmelita Covis moved into view around the corner of the house. She moved with a sort of animal-like grace. Barefooted, her only garment a close fitting calico dress that revealed, rather than hid the slim curves of her body. At sight of her Squarehead's face became red and his knife blade slipped, ruining a tiny statue of some saint. A month's labor spoiled. But that did not matter. The girl was mocking his awkwardness with her red mouth and her dark eyes.

"Why does the Senor Bootch call you Square-in-the-head?" she asked, seating herself on the doorstep near him. "He likes for to make the joke, no? Like he say to me, he say, 'Carmelita, you are one hell of the pretty keed but when you have the baby you weel be so fat, just like your old lady.'"

Squarehead smiled dumbly, horribly aware of her as she sat there, bare legged, scantily clothed, wriggling her bare toes in the yellow dust. Half-child, half-woman. Shy and bold and much too pretty to be running loose, talking to every man she met.

She talked on, taking the burden of conversation from him. And after a time some of the redness left the Swede's face and he smiled. But it was not until the little brother Pepe, naked as the day he was born and on an exploring expedition, fell into the big water trough and shrieked bloody murder till Squarehead yanked him out, that the man and girl became friends. She held the dripping youngster and soothed his crying, then gave him a spanking and sent him away with a kiss. Then she found the ruined little image of the saint and almost wept.

"I make you one. Lots more." Squarehead soothed her.

"But that is very nice," she smiled back at him. "I will pray to it. I know about prayers from the padres and the nuns at the school. And I am afraid that this one that is cut in two weel breeng, per'aps, some damn bad luck." For a moment her eyes darkened with fear. Her mother had often told of that terrible Pedro Salazar and his men. Had not her father almost been killed by him? Had not all her brothers been shot down? That Salazar was a bad man, and when he died his soul would cook forever in hell.

She went on to tell Squarehead how, but the day before that terrible tragedy, a little earthquake had come and had shaken down a small image of the Blessed Virgin from its niche in the wall. A bad omen. Squarehead's forehead wrinkled as he tried to follow her quick words. She swore with a careless ease that was shocking until one became used to it. Oaths that were meaningless as a parrot's chatter, gleaned no doubt, from the men who stopped at her father's house, or from the children in the dusty streets of border towns.

Her expressions, spiced as it were, with profanity, had a piquant charm. Squarehead listened. After a time he showed her his garden and together they planted some flower seeds. There was a box full of seeds sent out from the Department of Agriculture of the United States. He sent her home loaded with garden stuff.

Squarehead was happy that evening when Butch Riley rode into the ranch. But his smile became wistful when Butch again shaved and put on his fancy clothes and swaggered down towards where the adobe cabins stood outlined against the moonlit sky. The big Swede, leaning in the doorway of the kitchen, heard the girl welcome Butch with a

gay laugh. She had not laughed that way when she was with him. Squarehead knew what that laugh meant with its throaty quiver. He saw them walking together, too close together, and then their shadows blended into the night that was like velvet overhead, velvet, thickly sprinkled with jewels.

A heavy lump, like lead, seemed to weigh down the heart of the big Swede. His face and neck and hands burned as if with fever. He felt as a man must feel who is about to go mad. Love and hate and self-pity and bitterness. . . . His bare feet made no noise as he left the house.

Squarehead almost collided with old Lorenzo who stood on the trail in the dark shadow of a big hackberry tree. The shock of the meeting jerked Squarehead back to normal. The big fellow grinned foolishly and hid the keen bladed knife that he found himself carrying. The tall Mexican stood there in the shadow, face hidden under the wide brim of his sombrero, a faded serape pulled about his shoulders. For a second the two faced one another. Neither man spoke. Squarehead turned and went back to the house.

When Butch Riley showed up late that night, Squarehead was sitting in the kitchen, carving a block of wood with that odd-looking Swedish knife.

"What yuh makin'?" Butched rolled a cigarette and pulled the head of a match across the sole of his polished boot. The bronc twister's hair was mussed and the crimson silk scarf was gone from about his neck. Squarehead tried to smile and Butch was too flushed by the success of conquest to notice the change in the big Swede.

"I make this one into a man who has died and gone to hell. I read about it in a book called *Paradise Lost.* There was pictures in that book. Bad pictures. Pictures of men who went to hell."

"Any cowpunchers there?" grinned Butch, and answered his own question, "I bet there was. I just can't figger a cowhand playin' a harp made outa gold. Well, daylight comes early." And he went off to bed.

When Butch got up next morning, Squarehead was cooking breakfast. The wood box was powdered with delicate shavings and upon a shelf stood the half finished carving.

Crude, in a way, that carved little figure, yet startling in its reality. The body of a man, twisted horribly as if in mortal agony, head pulled sideways. Butch laid it down again and went outside to wash.

"If you come over to the corral after while, Squarehead," Butch told him when breakfast was over, "you'll see a show. I'm gonna top off that big black geldin' that's throwed a couple of the Old Man's bronc stompers. That black's a warthog and I don't mean perhaps. That little hot tamale of Lorenzo's wants to see some ridin'."

But Squarehead did not go over to the corral. He pretended that the pump needed mending. He heard the big black squeal, heard the pound of hard hoofs, the creak of saddle leather, the shrill yells of Carmelita and little Pepe. The black gelding was fighting hard. Now and then Squarehead could see the bobbing, hatless head of Butch as the bronc fighter rode for his sweetheart.

"I hope to God he throw you!" muttered Squarehead, "I hope he bust your damn neck, you . . . you . . . you Butch!"

But the black outlaw was not horse enough to throw Butch Riley. The girl's shrill cheering told Squarehead that. Squarehead started the engine and went back to his wood carving. When he saw Carmelita and the naked little Pepe coming, he went in the house and shut the door and stayed there, hidden, until she went away. He watched her from his hiding place as she swung along, bare legged, her slender little body rippling under the close fitting dress, Butch's

scarlet neckscarf tied about her head.

She did not come back to the house again until evening. Squarehead was peeling spuds and Butch was tinkering with the rigging of his bronc saddle.

"Hello, kid," grinned Butch with an ease that Squarehead hated him for because envy makes for hatred. "How'd you like the show?"

She shrugged her smooth shoulders and made some flippant reply in her own tongue. Then she smiled at Squarehead.

"Why do you hide like the coyote, when I come to make you visit, eh?" she asked. Squarehead went red. Butch grinned.

"Hid out, did he, kid?"

"He don't like girls," pouted Carmelita. "I bet he is afraid. Are you afraid of girls, Señor Squarehead?"

"Nah." Squarehead forced a grin.

"I bet he's a regular go-getter on his home range," said Butch. "Swedes make love different from you chili eaters. Up where he comes from, in the reindeer country, the winters is long. All ice and snow. Summer time they fish and make love to the girls. Then the ice spoils the fishin'. Squarehead's just outa practice because we don't have ice down here. Ain't that right, Squarehead?"

"Nah."

Squarehead did not look up. The shining blade of his knife was buried to its scrolled hilt in a large potato. Under the blonde fringe of his short lashes, his eyes were greenish, like the North Sea when the sun has lost its warmth.

Carmelita had found the little wooden image. "Ugh." She made a face. "It is ugly, this one. I see a man once who go loco, because, so they tell the padre, hees wife run away weeth 'nother man. He ees tweest like that and slobber from the mouth. He grab the knife from hees shirt and stick in into hees chest, one, two, three times. I and some more kids, we see that. Then we run away. He was like this wooden one, tweest so." She laid it back on the shelf.

Squarehead laughed. It was a short laugh that broke like some brittle thing. The blade of his knife stabbed another potato.

SQUAREHEAD'S garden prospered. The flowers he and the Mexican girl planted were budding. Almost two months had gone by since the coming of Butch Riley and the Covis family. Seven weeks, to be exact. For Squarehead those seven weeks had been seven eternities in purgatory. His eyes, no longer blue like the summer sky, were sunken in dark sockets. The grin on his mouth was but a grimace without meaning. Never talkative, he now became quiet to the point of sulleness.

"The damn' Swede's goin' plumb loco," Butch told the Old Man one day when he came down from Nogales. "All he does is whittle out crazy lookin' things outa wood and talk Scandahoovian to hisse'f. Better send down a new man."

"Mebbyso he needs a trip to town. A good drunk and some jane that'll take his dough. When he gets back, give him a good dose of salts and a chew of snoose and he'll be good for another three months. I'll have a talk with him. Best pump tender I ever had here."

But Squarehead did not want to go to town. The Old Man went to the medicine cabinet and mixed him up a double dose of salts. Then he went on back to town.

Squarehead was sick for two days and Butch had to do his own cooking. This was not at all to the liking of the big bronc twister and he left a dishpan full of dirty dishes for the Swede to clean up. It took Squarehead a whole day to clean up the place that was littered with cigarette stubs and matches.

Butch did not know that Squarehead had taken to following him at night, when he went walking with Carmelita.

Old Lorenzo might have known, for between the big Swede and the old Mexican there had sprung up a queer companionship.

They would sit together in the shade for hours. Lorenzo watching the Swede carve his little wooden figures. The Mexican language was beyond Squarehead's power of absorption and Lorenzo spoke but little English. Yet they seemed to understand one another. Had Butch Riley been less conceited and more observant, he might have taken the trouble to be careful. But Butch had a good-natured contempt for Mexican men. And he considered the Swede as just a harmless duffer who pumped water for the cattle, puttered with carrots and spuds and poppies, and did the housework. So Butch Riley took little pains to conceal the manner of his wooing.

Squarehead, back at work again, watched Butch putting on his good clothes one evening. In the heart of the big Swede there was still that element of worship for the handsome, devil-be-damned bronc rider. He liked to watch Butch pull on those shop made boots and buckle on the fancy cartridge belt with the carved holster that held the white handled gun. Squarehead forced a smile.

"You get married soon, Butch?"

"Married? Is that yore Swede idea of a joke? Married? Who to?"

"Carmelita Covis. She think you are swell feller, Butch."

"Sure. Why shouldn't she? That little hot tamale has good taste."

"When you get married to her, Butch?"

"Uh? You ain't serious, are yuh, Squarehead? Hell, she's just a paddle footed Mex. You know the kind of white men that marry greaser women. Squaw men, we call 'em. With fat wives and a herd o' breed kids. Kin you imagine Butch Riley gittin' yoked up with a Mex dame and havin' a mess of dirty faced breed brats a-callin' me papa? Don't be a damn' fool."

Butch was buttoning his fancy shirt with the white pearl buttons and did not see the look in the big Swede's eyes.

"But if there comes a baby," said Squarehead slowly, "and there is no papa, what about that?"

Butch turned, his eyes narrowed a little.

"Say, Swede, what the hell's the idea? You mind yore pumps and onions and dishes and keep yore nose outa my business or by God, I'll smash it for yuh. You bin grouchin' around here till you got on my nerves. I don't wanta start rappin' on yore jaw but I shore as hell will if yuh don't tend to yore whittlin' and let me alone. Get that?" Butch's big fists were doubled.

Squarehead dropped the stick he was whittling. In his right hand was the knife with its slim, keen blade and its point that would sink into flesh like a needle into butter. The Swede's eyes were congested and greenish. His jaw muscles quivered as he crouched back. Butch's gun was in the next room. Squarehead outweighed the bronc buster by forty pounds. Strong as a bull, quick, too. And he had a knife. But Butch grinned crookedly.

"Come and get it, you damn' Swede!"

Then, as they crouched, the night stillness was smashed with shouts and the pounding of hoofs. Shots ripped out. Butch, whirling like a cat, leaped to the door and barred it. In passing, he swung a fist against the lamp on the table.

"Get the guns, Squarehead!" he called. "It's Salazar!"

Squarehead stood in his tracks. The name of Salazar meant little to him. He knew little more than nothing about the rebel raiders. He looked out a window and saw a lot of men swinging off their horses. He heard a few shots, down by the cabins where Lorenzo Covis and his family lived. And he stood there stupid-

ly as a crowd of men crashed through the rear door into the house. Something crashed against his head and Squarehead went down like a shot beef. As he sank into a whirling black oblivion, he saw the stab of gun flame and dimly heard the roar of Butch's cracking six-shooter.

There was a light in the cabin when he woke. Half a dozen Mexicans in ragged clothes and big sombreros were standing about. One with a black mustache and heavy shoulders was sitting at the table. Against the wall leaned Butch, his clothes torn and bloody, his left arm soaked with blood from shoulder to finger tips. The blood dripped down, making a pool on the floor. When Squarehead sat up, then was kicked to his feet, Butch gave him a sneering look.

"A hell of a man, you are, Swede. Fight? Hell!"

The man with the black mustache jabbered a lot of words. Butch spat out a mouthful of dirt and blood and jabbered back.

"He says he's goin' to shoot us, Squarehead, unless we write to the Old Man for five thousand dollars ransom money. As if any cowman with a lick of sense would give more than forty bucks apiece for a cowpuncher and a lousy pump tender. I told him to go ahead and get it over with. If you'd slid the bar on that other door, we'd uh got some of these yellow babies. God, yo're a dumb egg. And you wanted me to marry into their tribe."

Squarehead rubbed the aching knot above his ear. "Tell him I do nothing, Butch. Who is he, huh?"

"Oh, dry up. Tell him yoreself."

Some more ragged soldiers dragged in Carmelita, Pepe and her mother. The old lady was white as chalk and the girl's dress was half torn off.

"*Madre de Dios,*" the girl whispered hoarsely. "Mother of God, show mercy!"

The old lady stood erect, her gray hair awry, her black eyes staring at a tall Mexican who held a Luger pistol in each hand. The tall man seemed to be some sort of an officer.

Salazar was smiling, twisting his heavy mustache, his dark eyes possessing the girl in her torn little dress. She shrank back and her hands fumbled with the ripped cloth, pulling the parts together across her breast.

"Where is that old wolf of a Lorenzo Covis?" Salazar asked. "I have ridden far to kill him." He spoke in Mexican.

"It is well for you, dog of a woman-butcher," shrilled the older woman, "that my husband is not here. For he would kill that man who stands behind you."

Her voice thinned to a scream and her hand pointed at the tall Mexican. At that moment a shot ripped through the window. The tall Mexican's face twisted. His hands dropped the guns and clutched at his throat that gushed red. Then he sank, gasping, blood streaming from his mouth, his falling body pitching across Salazar, who had leaped up, pushing away the dying man.

From outside came sounds of running feet. Then a volley. And a moment later the dead body of Lorenzo Covis was dragged into the room.

"My best officer," snarled Salazar, and the Colts in his hand roared. The gray haired mother of Carmelita sank slowly, a smile on her mouth, signing herself with the cross as she died there at her daughter's feet.

Squarehead stood there, his eyes wide with horror, breathing like a spent runner. Then, with a roar, he broke free from the two men that held him. His big fist crashed into the face of the leering Salazar. Then he swung a heavy chair like a flail, his big arms moving swiftly. Three men went down in a row like ninepins. Squarehead, bellowing, wild with berserk rage, ripped and tore and smashed. The chair splintered.

Salazar tried to rise and the big Swede caught him up and flung him against the far wall. The man's scream mingled with the sickening crack of bones.

Butch was at the door, barring it. Then he picked up a gun and began shooting out the window. Squarehead needed none of his assistance in subduing those men inside.

A bullet had ripped open the big Swede's cheek. A knife had slashed his thigh. He had picked up the last two combatants and cracked their skulls together.

Butch Riley stood there at the window, thumbing the hammer of his white handled gun. The yard outside swarmed with men running about in confusion.

Above the din rose the liquid notes of a bugle. The patio cleared swiftly, men running like rabbits before the federal cavalry that was coming.

Butch turned and stumbled to a chair. There was a crooked grin on his mouth when he looked at Squarehead who stood there in the center of the littered room, one big arm around the white faced girl and the sobbing Pepe. In his other hand was his knife. Carmelita was clinging to him with both hands.

"Squarehead," said Butch, "What I said awhile ago, I'm takin' it all back. Yo're a fightin' son-of-a-gun. And take care of her, old war hoss . . . she'll need yuh, now . . . so take care uh the little . . . hot . . . tamale."

Butch slid to the floor. His hands came away from his chest, filled with blood. He was dead when Carmelita and Squarehead bent over him. Across the dead body of the bronc fighter, Squarehead looked at the girl. His eyes were blue now. Very blue, and shining with unshed tears.

"I take care of you and Pepe," he said. She nodded.

THEY say, down there, that when Squarehead broke the body of Salazar, he broke the back of the revolution. The *Jefe* called and made a long speech which Squarehead did not understand. And he married Carmelita to Squarehead and there was a big barbecue and fiesta. Squarehead wore socks and shoes and a blue serge suit and Carmelita cut his hair. She told him that she was very happy and that she would work hard for him and bear him many children. Squarehead smiled all the time like a big schoolboy.

Everybody laughed hard when Pepe, dressed in a new velvet suit that was too tight, fell into the water trough and was fished out and let run loose to dry in the sun. And when all the guests had gone and the Old Man had shaken hands with Squarehead and kissed the bride and told them, before he drove off in the flivver buckboard, that he was furnishing the big house for them next week, when Squarehead and Carmelita were alone, they walked to the garden.

Together they picked the garden clean and decorated the three graves behind the house. Squarehead had made them each a cross and was going to carve a saint on each one.

And when Squarehead had shut down the pump and Carmelita had finished the dishes, they sat there on the step outside the door. Everything was very quiet and the stars were like twinkling gold dust on velvet. They were content, far happier than most of us ever hope to be.

Back in an empty room, the fancy silver mounted trappings that had belonged to Butch Riley were already gathering the dust that would soon corrode their glitter.

On a day toward spring, they went to find him. They stared at what they saw in the cabin.

THE WATCHING EYES

By PAUL ANNIXTER

THE remote northern valley of the Kinnebec is a wild impassable tangle of windfalls and frost-spilt boulders that hide the thicket-choked stream; the contours of its rocky ridges are inexpressibly remote and formidable.

Manitou, so said the Crees who once peopled the hills, had cursed the place and ground it under His heel.

The werewolf, *la loup garou*, lives in the Kinnebec country; and witch fires and death moons, and wild beasts possessed of devils; snakes, owls and catamounts in league with Satan. A sudden draft of cold air wending the woods on a warm day is a sign a Windego, evil spirit of the northern Indians, has passed that way.

Did not old Guyles Le Brunnec, the first settler of the country, wage two year warfare against a family of black wolverines that strove to drive him away from the valley? And was not young Blind Wolf, who later became chief of all the northern Crees, ushered into this world by the scream of a white panther outside his father's tepee and when he died thirty-five years later, with a death chant on his lips, did not the same white panther come back to see him off?

All these tales, fears, and demons had their source in the Kinnebec itself. Deep in that jungle of snags and fallen trees, in the valley bottom where the air was charged with the rank odor of rotting vegetation, was the abode of a particularly malignant Windego. The Crees repeated the story of Scot McKinnon, a half-breed, who five years before had run his trap line right up the Kinnebec valley and over a spur of Lone Mountain. He had built himself a cabin half way up the valley, for it was in his Celtic blood to laugh at those firelight tales

told in cabin and tepee. Long and long the menfolk at Elkwan waited for McKinnon's return, and then on a day toward spring, they went to find him. They stared—he lay frozen and dead in his cabin, his throat and body torn with marks made by no known beast. For four years thereafter his cabin had stood deserted, shunned of men, while the forest slowly reclaimed it.

All these things were known to young Jules Le Brunnec, descendant of that Guyles who fought the wolverines. He too was a trapper born not twenty miles from the Kinnebec, and he had sucked in these superstitions and legends with his mother's milk. But he met Fanchon Doré.

Fanchon had turned nineteen, with her cloudy black hair and soft enigmatic laughter. The best French blood in the province flowed in Fanchon's veins, they said, and her beauty was a byword in the country. Her jade-green eyes had a fox-fire lure that wilted men's purpose, and her lithe upspringing body had never known a modern stricture.

None of these things were lost upon young Jules Le Brunnec, who spent as much time pondering them as he did his trap lines, with disastrous effects. But one Fall afternoon filled with killdeer calls and jay notes the two walked together in the woods and he wrung from her the nearest thing to a promise, that the following spring she might come to live in the old Le Brunnec house on the hardwood knoll above the river.

That night Jules laughed and leapt in the dark as he went home in the starlight, and it was then that he made his decision. He would run his traps that winter up the Kinnebec valley. The historic Guyles Le Brunnec, for all his valor, had left his descendants nothing but his name and his traps. Competition was sharp among the settlement men for likely trapping range, but never was there competition in the Kinnebec valley. There he determined to winter it, in the cabin of the dead McKinnon.

He left a week later at dawn after the first snows, hauling his gear on a light sledge. He had told no one of his plans. The late afternoon found him deep in the shadowy tangle of the valley bottom. The unbroken snow along the slopes was shadowed a pallid blue in the gray reluctant light; the winter hills brooded under a leaden sky in a stillness that was like a roar of sound. He found the cabin an hour before the winter darkness fell, a buried crypt of a place, smothered by the young growth of evergreens. It stood in the densest part of the forest in an appalling desolation. Beards of moss clung to the roof and the door had fallen inward. Round about the air was heavy with mouldering wood, for the sun never penetrated here, and it was charged with vague foreboding that was not physical.

Jules Le Brunnec had lived much in the open beyond the sound of human tongues, had learned the subtle speech of places as well as the things that ran and flew. He was sentient as the red Indian to the voices of wind and storm, the sigh of night, and the soundless song of growing things and bursting buds in spring. He could hear the almost inaudible warnings of storm or danger that ran down forest aisles from bird to beast; he could judge the weather by the low communings of the black bear shuffling under the moon. To him the valley spoke clear and direct; he understood it and he liked it not.

Until well past dark he worked clearing the place of drifted snow, cutting firewood and propping the door in place with a split log. As he worked he had the uncomfortable sense that he was not alone, that he was being watched by malign and inimical eyes. And that night as he lay in his bunk he heard the thing, whatever it was, prowling without, heard the sound of its breathing and the crunch of dry snow as it circled the cabin.

The prowling continued and in savage anger at the persistent creature, Le Brunnec snatched up his rifle, flung the door aside and stepped out. In the inky blackness without, his eyes could penetrate scarcely a yard, but out of it came a harsh rasp of breathing and a sound like a snicker of teeth, so close and so laden with hate and menace that the trapper retreated behind the barred door like a craven.

LATER, deep into the night it was, he heard the cry. It rose from the depths of the black forest no more than a hundred yards from the cabin, a long-drawn wailing sound, half howl, that rose to a harsh scream and was suddenly silenced. The uncanny menace of it brought Le Brunnec bolt upright in his bunk, with the hair prickling on his scalp, for its like he had never heard before. It was no howl of wolf or scream of hunting lynx or panther. Neither was it the maniacal squalling cry that is sometimes made by a hunting wolverine, or Injun-devil, that giant weasel of the north which can outfight a wolf, lynx or panther, and make the black bear give ground. Fear of the supernatural turned the young trapper's blood to ice as he listened in the blackness for a repetition of the dread sound, thankful for the thickness of the cabin walls. But though he scarce closed his eyes that night the cry was not repeated. All he heard was the sounds the frost made as it ate into the forest trees.

The morning light revealed a persistent circle of big splayed tracks round and round the cabin, in zigzag lines. The hairy soles left deep imprints in the snow, startlingly like hands, except for the long fierce claw marks. Again the young trapper was daunted, for the identity of the prowler was not plain to him. More than anything else the shuffling trail resembled a wolverine's, but it was larger than any wolverine track Le Brunnec had ever seen. Almost the size of bear tracks, but certainly no bears would be abroad in the forest so late in the winter.

Jules' bronzed face was grim and set. Here was handicap at the outset; now he could well believe the tales that were told of this valley. If the maker of the tracks was indeed no more than a beast of flesh and blood and extraordinary size, it still boded ill for any trapper here. Well he knew the fiendish cunning of the wolverine and its aversion to man and traps. Few pelts would ever fall to his lot while this creature haunted his trail.

That morning the young trapper spent in clearing the smother of evergreens around the cabin walls for a space of a dozen yards, and he did it grimly as one who clears for battle. With the afternoon he set off up the valley to lay out and blaze his trap line, but only half his faculties were on the work. The other half were on the *qui vive*, probing the smothering silence for a sight of the enemy whose watchful nearness he felt with that sixth sense the lone woodsman has. He carried his rifle slung over his shoulder and again and again he turned abruptly in the hope of surprising whatever it was that shadowed him, but the dim aisles of the evergreens gave no sign, nothing but those sinister splayed tracks which were everywhere, and which on his return trip he found blent insolently with his own.

Then twilight of another night, and darkness and the prowling enemy again held sway, while the man within the cabin lay still as one who holds a fortress against a league of evil. He knew that a siege was in store. Besides his fear of the unseen, the mind of the young trapper was oppressed by the belief of all French Canadians that ill fortune fastens upon the man who is molested by a wolverine. Once more he heard the shuffling tread of the marauder without, and when finally he slept it was to dream

that menacing eyes were watching him through the chinks in the cabin walls.

At dawn, filled with wrath at his almost sleepless night, Le Brunnec set forth with his rifle, bent on hunting down his enemy. Whatever it might be, werewolf, Windego or beast of flesh and blood, it at least had substance. Substance enough to make deep tracks in the snow, and therefore to feel Jules' knife or well-aimed bullet. Let him sight the creature once at fair rifle range and he would see who was master of the valley. If it were a creature of this earth it must fall. If not, Jules would willingly flee the valley, acknowledging defeat.

All that day and most of the next he hunted, but his efforts were without result, and throughout he had the mocking sense that the enemy was aware of his motive, and was often near him, yet he could glimpse nothing save the silent trees and shadowed snow. Many times he doubled suddenly and ran back along his trail seeking to surprise the watcher, and once he was rewarded by a fleeting glimpse of brownish fur just fading into the spruce gloom. He fired and heard his bullet ricochet among the trees. He saw that he had missed as he sped forward. The creature's speed was amazing, for though he followed on for hundreds of yards he caught no glimpse of the beast and soon lost the trail entirely in a maze of other tracks, that crossed a glade, his own included.

Meantime the enemy had visited Jules' trap line, carefully marking every set he had made. On inspecting the line he found that each set had been visited, the traps sprung and most of them carried away or hidden. The baits were left lying on the snow, but all of the catches were either torn to pieces or carried bodily away. There could be no doubt now that the valley was rich fur ground. There was evidence that both marten and ermine had fallen in his sets. Beneath his wrath Jules felt a degree of relief, for these tactics ran true to the tradition of wolverine rather than demon.

Forthwith Jules gave up all idea of trapping fur until his enemy had been slain. He set himself grimly to a game of stalking and patience, and the planting of traps and deadfalls for the mastery of the valley and the destruction of his enemy. But he had much to learn of the uncanny craft and persistence of that valley's evil genius.

Jules put all his craft into the game. He made arrows of dry pine and fastened to each cunningly poisoned bait—portions of fresh killed squirrels and rabbits. He handled them with gloves which had been treated with a solution of lye to kill all human taint. With a crude thong bow he shot these arrows into the forest, far from any tracks of his. Likewise he made a number of hollowed sticks which he filled with doctored bacon and left beneath the snow.

The tracks next day showed that the enemy had disregarded them all, had not even taken the trouble to smell them out.

DURING the next two days it seemed as if the beast had withdrawn from the fray entirely, for a light snow had fallen and though he traversed the valley for many miles, Jules came upon no fresh trail. By the second afternoon he had begun to wonder if in truth the marauder had quit the region and he was left in peace, but that night a fresh disclosure, both eerie and calamitous, awaited him. When he returned to the cabin the door was gaping wide. The enemy had taken advantage of his absence, ripped away the stout thongs which held it shut, entered and wrecked the place. Jules' bunk had been torn to pieces, his blankets, those that weren't torn in strips, had been carried away, and all of the traps he had left stored beneath the bunk had been stolen. But worst of all his precious food supply on

which he had depended to keep him through the midwinter months, was almost demolished. Cornmeal and flour lay spilled on the floor. The bacon and coffee were gone, even the bulk of his tinned goods had been carried away.

That point left the man dumbfounded. He knew all about the thieving tendencies of wolverines, but this robbery bore the earmarks of far more than animal cunning, and once more the heart of Le Brunnec was quelled with superstitious awe. And as he stood there in the demolished room there rose again from the dusk of the forest that eerie, marrow-chilling cry, ending in a cat-like scream. It was perfectly timed and designed to sway a mind far more balanced than Jules', to break his spirit completely. Only grim determined purpose kept him from fleeing, whipped and beaten, from the valley that very night. Instead, wrath boiled to the surface, driving back all fear. He shook his fist at the brooding forest and from his throat came a cry of rage.

"You beeg devil! Ah feex you, ah feex you good for this! You wait!"

He would not be driven out.

Once more he heard the cry, this time farther away. Jules barred the door, made a sketchy meal on the few scraps he could find, and lay down on his bunk covering himself with his long caribou coat, but he did not sleep. By midnight, he knew, there would be a moon. For that he waited, and as soon as there was luminance enough he looked to the action of his rifle, stepped into the thongs of his snow-shoes and departed on a still hunt.

Words cannot tell what fears the young Frenchman overcame as he set forth into the black forest to face he knew not what. Fear of the unguessed, the unknown, clamped at his heart, but he drove it back. Whatever the night-wailer was, evil spirit or four-footed thief, it could not be far away, and Jules knew he could give any forest creature a fair start and run it down in deep snow.

He found the fresh trail in the snow and followed at the half-running gait of the expert snowshoer. As he swung along the ghostly white shapes of rabbits flitted away before him in the moonlight. Out here in the night he was giving odds to the enemy, carrying the fight into alien ground, but he knew no caution.

On and on he followed, lifting his feet expertly to muffle the click of his snowshoes, eyes scanning the shadows ahead. His muscles were tense for swift action should he catch sight of a shadowy form in the dim obscurity. In spite of the cold, sweat ran down his face, but never a glimpse of the enemy did he catch.

The trail showed that the beast was moving at top speed; the unknown was aware of pursuit. Jules redoubled his efforts. If only he could draw close enough to line up his rifle sights on the robber, he would soon see if he were of this world or not.

An hour passed and the wind began to shift. Scudding clouds drifted over the face of the moon. Soon he could scarcely make out the tracks under the shadow of the spruce, and before long he had lost them entirely in a stretch of jumbled snags and down-timber. He would have followed that trail indefinitely, camped on it till the feud was settled, but once again the odds were all with the enemy. Even his own back trail was now indistinguishable.

As he turned back toward the cabin there drifted to him again out of the black forest that unearthly cry, like a mocking challenge at his defeat.

The muscles of Le Brunnec's face set stone-hard. The hated thing had at least fled before him. He would not leave. He would stick it out, live on rabbit meat if need be, and one day the tables would be turned.

The following morning a light snow fell and Le Brunnec gathered in every

trap that remained to him, a dozen in all, and planted them on a new line, burying each set craftily in the snow with its log clog. And all along the line at every approach to a set he erected clever log deadfalls which would crush the life from even a four hundred pound bear. The snow continued to work with him, covering all his traces, and Jules was elated. If the prowler followed along this line he could scarcely escape catastrophe.

That night as he dined on a rabbit Jules indulged in high surmise. He slept little during the night and lay listening for the enemy, but heard nothing. All next morning he stayed away from the new line, hoping and listening. It was not until late afternoon that he went forth to see if his trick had scored. He arrived at the first of his deadfalls and stood amazed. The creature had visited his line and with a strength and cunning not of earth had approached each deadfall from the rear, hurling aside the logs which blocked his way, and heaved the heavy timbers to the ground, making the deadfalls useless. The craftily concealed traps had been exposed and sprung, and those which held a catch were robbed.

Incredulous, unable to believe that any woods creature could summon such sagacity, the man traversed the entire line. Everywhere the tracks of the thief were thick, and each of his ponderous deadfalls had been leveled like the first. On he walked.

Suddenly Jules' right snowshoe, on which he had just placed his weight, sank beneath him. There was a rasping metallic clink and from the snow on each side of him two fanged steel jaws snapped upward, closing with a wrenching pang upon his leg just below the knee.

He had placed his foot directly upon the pan of a double-spring bear trap craftily hidden beneath the snow. Hidden, too, within the past twelve hours, for he had been over this very spot the day before! The trap was no ancient rusted thing; it was in good condition, even oiled.

A great doubt and a great fear oppressed the heart of Le Brunnec, and all the flouted tales he had heard of this valley returned to mock him. Was this thing the work of a devil in brute shape?

Red stains began to show through the thick cloth of his trousers, but he moved and found that no bones had been broken. The wood and thongs of his snowshoe had somewhat deadened the clash of the studded jaws.

Panic-stricken, pain-driven, he fell to tugging desperately at the chain, like one of the animals he himself had trapped. The only effect was to change the pain of his leg to actual torture, as the cruel teeth bit deeper and deeper into his flesh. He tried stamping with his other foot on the spring, but the jaws were locked. Hopeless.

The cold sweat of overpowering fear came out on Jules' body, a terror contracted his heart, caught at his breath. It was already dusk and growing colder rapidly. He would soon freeze to death. He had seen human skeletons held by a leg in traps. The one way to spring a bear trap was with the clamps which went with the trap. The clamps which only the unknown trapper possessed.

At last he let himself down in the snow and crouched waiting, with the dull apathy that comes to all trapped things. The game was plainly up. As well to lie still now and let the elements work their will on him.

The cold increased as dusk drew on. Deeper and deeper bit the fangs of the frost, numbing his aching leg. Suddenly Jules heard a stealthy crunching in the snow not far away. With a hand beginning to numb he reached for his rifle and drew it to him, then lay as one dead. Waiting. Finally in the black circle of nearby spruce there was a movement. He watched, with heart shaking his body with its hammering, until a dark

squat shape drew to the very edge of the clearing and crouched peering.

Jules took swift aim and fired from where he lay. The thing, whatever it was, pitched forward in the snow, struggling. Jules sat up, took careful aim and fired again. Then his heart gave a great surge, of horror and of hope. In its death throes the figure had detached itself from the shadows and Jules could plainly see, stretched on the white snow, a fur-clad human form!

No time now, though, to conjecture whether this was the demon that had been tormenting him, or an innocent man. If the creature lying there had set this trap he possessed the clamp to spring it. Everything depended on that. He must act swiftly or die.

With his skinning knife Jules dug down through the snow to uncover the end of the trap chain. Nearly an hour of excruciating labor uncovered the clog. It was a log, heavy and thick; only by great effort could he move it. Panting, perspiring, groaning with the pain that shot through him at every move he rolled and dragged the cumberous thing across the hundred yards of snow. He made it at last, exhausted with the agony, and he sank down trembling beside the still form at the edge of the spruce.

At first he thought that in very truth he was looking upon some demon from the nether world, as he turned the body of the fallen one on its back. The face he looked on was dark and pock-marked and horribly distorted, framed in lank black hair. The open eyes had the steel glare of a wolf's. Jagged yellowed teeth showed in the open mouth. The body was clad entirely in bearskin, the feet were encased in crude moccasins made of the hind feet of a bear, with the claws still adhering.

To Jules everything became plain. There would be no more mysterious trails dogging his own along the trap-line, no more eerie wailings at dead of night. For some reason, perhaps dementia, perhaps a trapper's greed, the Indian had striven to drive him out of the valley.

Terror gave way to quick action. In a greasy pocket of the bearskin he found the clamp—the bit of metal that meant his release from the trap and possible survival.

IT WAS four days later before Jules could leave his cabin and limpingly, slowly, joyfully resume operations on his trap line. As soon as his leg healed he explored the valley until he found the stronghold of the dead Indian, a crude log dugout built in the side of a cliff. There he found his stolen traps and the pelts he had caught and the bulk of his looted provisions. The valley proved to be a haven of fur and as if fate had relented of her harshness, luck attended the young trapper for the remainder of the winter. In May when Jules and Fanchon went to live on the hardwood knoll, they had nearly four thousand dollars.

A night of flaming courage at sea is in Jaclund Marmur's story RESCUE in the next issue.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

EACH time Gordon Young has set out really to thump his typewriter and knock it apart, out of the clatter set up by his inspired fingers have walked characters that have made friends the world around.

Hurricane Williams, bitter wanderer of the Islands and Dan McGuire, his bucko mate, laughing through his beard.

Don Everhard, of the night places, the man of ice.

Gordon Young's typewriter has been rumbling again like a distant thunder.

Now, in this issue, swaggering a little from the roll of the schooner *Marigold* in the South Seas, comes a new character—Cap'n Bill Jones, with a reckless blue eye and a bottle of square-faced gin.

You will notice, in the novel "Captain Calamity," a character named Black Pierre. A smooth devil he is, though he plays no great part in this yarn—and at sight of him Cap'n Bill Jones feels like a falling barometer.

The sun is glinting on those blue seas. A couple of schooners are taking on form. One of them is the *Marigold* again, and on her deck Cap'n Bill Jones is saying something profane to glistening coal-colored Peter.

Captain Bill Jones hasn't a shirt on his torso this day, because that sun is so-damned hot.

YOU should by now be a little familiar with the strange world of compressed air under the river. In this issue appears the third of Borden Chase's fine stories, written right out of the sweat of his own experience. Pat Doyle and Polack Joe are alive—he knows them, and you will too. Borden Chase is a little concerned over the technical difficulties of his setting. He can find his way around down there in the dark—often has, in fact—but what, he asks, about the reader? He has a conscientious but mistaken anxiety that the reader might be groping around in his story. He says:

> In a story, too much explanation draws a frown. But if I were listening to one of you spin a tale of two old time Western gunfighters, I'd want to know how they talked and acted when they weren't slinging a gun. And why did they start wearing them tied down?
>
> Maybe there are others like me. To them I offer these few words. Beneath the river, all bets are off—it's a different world. A reason can be found in the report of E. W. Moir, when he took charge of the building of the old Hudson and Manhattan Tunnels. It read, "the men had died at the rate of 25 per cent per annum and nobody had seemed to care anything about it."
>
> That was a few years back. Since then the death rate has decreased. But I have drunk whiskey with many a sandhog on Thursday night (pay night) and kicked in a few dollars the next day to a collection for his widow. Nothing killed him—he just dropped dead. It's a habit with the boys who work in the air—dying quickly.
>
> Consequently, few of us save. And few of us worry about tomorrow. But as long as men live, something must drive them. And in the tunnel, it is pride.
>
> Pat Doyle may seem a queer character. But there are Pat Doyles in every heading gang. Illogical, contradictory—or maybe just plain crazy in the estimation of the average man. But there is a place for them in the tunnel; they belong there, because—well, damn it, they're *men*.
>
> So much for that.
>
> In the July issue I promised to let you know how things were going under the Hudson River on the new Midtown Hudson Tunnel. I meant well. And when they broke ground for the shafts I went over and had a look around. The shafts go down in rock on both

sides of the river and any of you old timers who are "hard rock men" won't blame me for not wanting any part of the rock dust and powder smoke that are part of the job. So I decided to wait until the air went on.

Then, one of the motion picture companies bought a novel of mine about the river tunnels. And contrary to the usual belief about motion picture outfits, they wanted it to be authentic. Real sandhogs. So, I'm going out to lend a hand and see what we can do about it. Probably, after ten years in the river tunnels, I'll trip over a curbstone in Hollywood and twist my neck.

But if I don't, the Hudson River job is good for three years. I'll catch hell from the sandhogs, but I'll go back. Then when the river comes in (and it usually does) we'll talk it over back here.

—BORDEN CHASE

A PRISONER in Walla Walla Penitentiary agrees that *"Adventure's* is the fiction of escape." He intends no humor, and he makes a striking remark —a cell six by ten feet can hold the whole Himalayan range. Answer to the query in his letter: Your friend was misinformed. If you have faith in your story, gamble the fifty cents.

Walla Walla, Wash.

I wonder if you knew when you wrote the words—"Adventure's is the fiction of escape" —just how close you came to calling the turn? I've been reading the magazine for some years, I can't say how many off hand, but quite a few—and in some queer spots—three or four prisons, and at trading posts clear across the Northwest Territories, from the Hudson Bay to the Alaskan border.

When you spoke of "escape" and "release," doubtless it was with folk in mind who were tied down to some humdrum job in the cities. Did you know that *Adventure* is one of the favorites with that submerged tenth who go by numbers instead of names? Well, it is. I get the magazine each month in here, and there is a waiting list of fifteen or twenty to whom I pass it on, and the howl of some gorilla, if another ahead of him keeps the magazine too long, is a tribute to its quality.

As a woodsman who went haywire a few years ago, I know what I'm saying when I talk of release. On numerous occasions the steel walls of a cell, wherein under normal conditions I could stand and touch both sides at once, have rolled back until they encompassed the full sweep of an Arctic blizzard, and head down I've bucked the storm with Pierce (where is he, by the way?) to the shelter of timber. Or again perhaps Dingle, Wetjen or Adams spins a salty yarn of the sea and drab walls recede to leave in their places a tumbled waste of whitecaps, where stout ships and stouter men hurl a challenge. Lamb, with his wild Cossacks, carving destiny to suit their ends. Tuttle, and his Hashknife always wondering what's beyond the farthest hill. Young, and Don Everhard—there's a guy who would tear down the ridge pole of Hell—if same pal needed a ladder. Mundy and his Jim Grim tribe. Would you believe that a cell six feet by ten could hold the whole Himalayan range? No? Well, you've most likely never read one of Mundy's stories by light filtered through two sets of bars. Then, too, there were stories wherein animals were the sole actors written by F. St. Mars—peace to his shade. Has *Adventure* discontinued printing stories of that type? Of late they have been woefully scarce, and I am directly concerned there; but, of that, more later.

Your time and my space are far too limited to drag my likes out interminabally, as they cover just about the entire contents of every issue I've read. The only fault I have with *Adventure* is its small size and once-a-month appearance. How about the husky, twice-a-month magazine of a few years ago? No, I don't think the two-bits price would be too high.

Well, I've blown that out of my system. Pressure, over about a ten-year period, has been building, until it was a case of escape or explode. Now, if you can spare the time, I'd like answers to some questions. I want it definitely understood, however, that your reply, or its lack will make no difference in my preference for *Adventure,* and that I'm not "throwing a curve" for either sympathy or an advantageous connection. As I said, I'm a woodsman who went haywire—but time and a parole board will fix that—and I'll be a woodsman again. In prison, I've studied and read rather widely, until at the end of several years of effort, I write what I hope is a good story. I'll admit though, that words and phrases take more painstaking sneakin' up on than a moose, which brings me to the secondary purpose of this letter.

Some months ago, I mentioned to a writer-friend, that I planned to mail some scripts to *Adventure.* He told me to save my money, that one of his friends had submitted a story which was returned with a letter to the effect that *"Adventure* does not consider material mailed from a prison." Does this policy exist, or was my friend misinformed. I read your letter in *"Writer's Digest"* but in spite of its strong terms, I am still in doubt and as my income is two big dollars a month, derived from writing for the prison magazine, spending half a dollar uselessly on postage bulks larger than shoving in half a stack of checks on a busted flush in the old days.

When I asked you about stories of the F. St. Mars type, it was with the thought in mind of submitting some. If my stuff comes up to your standard, I could give you plenty, for writing of animals and the woods is my particular kind of escape.

My queries are unconventional I know, but

I sincerely hope to hear from you soon. In the meantime—Good Luck to *Adventure*, from a lot of mugs whose numbers are on their backs, not in phone-books.

—R. L., 13734

CRITICISM from a reader who likes Gordon Young and Arthur O. Friel. A stirring novelette by Friel will appear soon.

Bronx, N. Y.

It is not my intention to insult you or try to tell what is best, but with all respect to your judgment I dare say that your magazine surely has degenerated to third or fourth class of its kind. A few years back it was a first class magazine selling for 25 cents a copy, and the public got their money's worth by reading stories by Gordon Young and Arthur O. Friel who are about the best writers that your magazine ever had.

What happened to these writers? Very seldom I see or rather read a story by those authors. The only thing you can read in your magazine nowadays are cowboy stories fit for children who still believe in western stories or gangster dramas which do not instruct the public at all but to the contrary undermine their character. Do not think that by any chance I am trying to be a hypocrite or a reformer, not at all; I am merely trying to open your eyes and show you that the public cannot get good stories when you are selling your magazine for 15 cents a copy.

The public is willing to pay 25 cents if you give them stories that are worth the money, not stories about horses, cattle, automobile races like that story "Rubber" that I read the other day, but stories like the ones I have read by Arthur O. Friel about the South American jungles and also about the jungles of Africa. Those are what I call instructive and wholesome stories that keep you in suspense all the way through.

Wake up.

—EDWARD LUCIANO

A WELCOME letter from an old friend:

Dutch Flat, Cal.

This morning I happened to see an *Adventure;* and am very glad to see it. *Adventure* has come to be something of an Institution, spelt with a capital letter. A part of these United States. So at any rate it feels to me.

I see some remarks re that fine old chanty, "Blow the man down." Bob Frothingham quotes me. I am not a very accurate authority. I don't pretend to be. In writing him re the chantey I expressed my own feelings toward it. There was always, when that old chantey was being sung, a challenge in the voices of the singers: for we were usually hoisting a topsail at the end of, or toward the end of, a big blow. Once, leaving land in the winter, we furled topsails very night just at dark and we set them each morning at a little before the dawn. What a weary dreary drag we did have down channel and across the bay on that voyage! Head winds, head winds, head winds; and always the decks awash. Cold as old misery. No cheer. No warmth. Weary arms. Sore hands. Wet to the hide always. But every night, toward dawning, that old chantey was roared across the sullen winter sea. Every night for some ten nights we sent those heavy topsails to their mastheads to the tune of "Blow the man down." And always when I am asked about that chantey I recall how it made me feel to listen to, and to take part in, the singing of it. It was an answer to the cold hard challenge of the bitter winter seas.

—BILL ADAMS

A GREAT many queries and communications have come in about that ballad of the tropical tramp—*The Down-and-Out*. It will appear in Campfire in the next issue, and that issue is only two weeks away. The first four lines give you the swing of it.

So, son, you've come to the tropics, heard all that you had to do
Was to sit in the shade in a cocoanut glade, while the dollars rolled in to you?
They gave you that at the Bureau, you got the statistics straight?
Well, hear what it did to another kid before you decide your fate.

Adventure will go on sale hereafter fifteen days before its date. The September 15th issue will appear on your newsstand on September first.

W. C. Tuttle will lead the issue with a 32,000 word complete novel. It was a pleasure to read it—it has the good Tut humor, as well as much action.

He, by the way, has been sending some long distance hints on the training of a bird dog. Something happens inside Tut when he sees or hears about a bird dog—some of you may know his humorous articles on the subject. But whatever he writes comes through with a chuckle just at a time when the reader might find himself taking things too seriously—as you will see in his next story.

—H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

For Free Information and Services
You Can't Get Elsewhere

DO YOU want to know how to waterproof a walking shoe? Are you interested in the migrating habits of the humming bird or the longest flight made by a balloon? Or is it Indian arrows, the language spoken in Tibet, or do you just want to know what to take along on a two weeks' camping trip? The authorities of Ask Adventure can tell you.

A MAN of courage and determination demands our respect and best wishes.

Request:—I am a student of comparative religion and mysticism. I contemplate going to Ceylon or Siam and entering a Buddhist monastery as a bhikhu in the Hinayana teaching, remaining say one year, then making a pilgrimage as a Buddhist mendicant to some location to the north where I can again enter a monastery and absorb the Mahayana doctrine.

Does a white man lose face when he enters a monastery with the native Buddhists?

What attitude might be expected from the natives (1) inside the monastery and (2) from those outside? What about the attitude of the white people near?

Do you know of any temple where provision is made for English speaking students?

What country would you advise me to go to first to begin my Spiritual Adventure?

—C. WAKEFIED, Berkeley, Cal.

Reply by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—What a pity it is that my good friend U Dammaloka has passed on to the infinite contemplation of the Jewel. For he did the very thing that you contemplate, and, had he been alive, I could have sent you to him.

U Dammaloka was an ex-Catholic priest who turned Buddhist and submerged his former life in his newer studies. His real name I don't feel at liberty to disclose.

Dammaloka took up his studies in Burma; and I would urge you, if you have fully made up your mind to what will be perhaps a more drastic break from your former life than you imagine, to consider Burma rather than either Ceylon or Siam.

The people of Burma are so infinitely a pleasanter people to deal with. A kindly, happy-go-lucky people with a vast tolerance for the foibles and queer viewpoints of other people.

The Cingalese of Ceylon are more aggressive, more intolerant, and inordinately swellheaded about owning the "Tooth."

In Siam your great difficulty would be the language.

In Burma, on the other hand, you will find plenty of natives speaking English and eager to help you. Furthermore, Burma today is a far higher center of Buddhist culture thar is Ceylon.

I would suggest that you head for Mandalay in Upper Burma which is the location selected by U Dammaloka, and is a town replete with fascinating stories of the old days before the British occupation, and much more truly a native town than is Rangoon, which has grown into a vast commercial port.

I don't believe there exists anywhere any temple making special provision for English speaking students. But in Mandalay you will find English speaking hoongyis or priests who will be delighted to receive you into their religion—once you have convinced them that you are serious.

I don't know that you realize exactly what a tremendous break you contemplate from all previous habits. I feel that I must inject a modicum of warning to you.

First, you cannot have any conception of the enormity of race prejudice until you have experienced some of it. I tell you flatly that you *cannot* combine native and white. If you enter a monastery as a student, you cut off all communication with white people. Not on account of any monastery rule; but solely on account of white snootiness.

You may study Buddhism in your own house with native teachers; and the white folks would think you merely crazy. But if you go into a monastery you must make up your mind to do without white contacts. If you propose to go out with a begging bowl in the streets, you must be prepared to be pointed out and stared at like a circus freak. You will find as much distinction between yourself and other white people as between white and colored in the South.

Consider the fortitude that you would require, were you suddenly to go colored in the Southern United States. You will require just as much fortitude to go native in the far East, and the change in the manner of living will be immensely greater. You will hardly be able to form a conception of how great a change until you have seen the East.

Still, I don't for a moment advise you not to attempt what you want to do. Your proposal is a fascinating one; and if you can carry it through, you will have a fascinating experience. Only, I warn you, it will require moral courage of a supreme order.

I am presuming that you have money enough to get there and to live for a while until you make your connections. Consider forty dollars a month as your minimum living expenses; absolute rock bottom minimum, until you learn the ropes. Let me add the advice that you keep in reserve enough money to come back home, in case you find the adventure too difficult a one.

But go ahead and try it. It will be a splendid adventure.

One final advice. Take millions of photographs and acres of notes. You will be doing a thing that very few white people have done. You will be seeing a phase of life that is a sealed book to white people. The information that you collect will be invaluable. Don't miss an item of it.

I wish you luck. I hope you don't ever arrive at the *aneiksa, dookha, anata,* the change, decay and disillusion.

And when you get there, I want to hear from you. I shall want to know how you find things and how you progress.

SNAKES, serpents, vipers and allied reptiles, hooped and otherwise.

Request:—"Is there a snake with a sting in its tail. And if so is it poisonous? I have been of the opinion that it is a myth like the hoop snake?

"Second: How many poisonous varieties of snakes are there in the United States?

"Third: What is a glass snake?

"Fourth: Is a puff adder the same as a spreading adder? Are these true adders?

"Fifth: Is the coral snake native to the United States or has it emigrated from South America?

"Sixth: Has the fer-de-lance come as far north as the United States?

"Seventh: Do black snakes make a habit of chasing a person if he runs from it?"

—BYRON B. JONES, Marion, Ala.

Reply by Mr. Karl P. Schmidt:—First: There is no snake with a poisonous sting on its tail. The stinging snake story is the ancestor of the hoop snake story. Nonsense.

Second: There are five kinds of poisonous snakes in North America north of Mexico.

1. The common coral snake.
2. The Arizona coral snake.
3. The moccasin and copperhead.
4. The massassanga and ground rattler.
5. The true rattlesnakes (with numerous distinct species).

Third: The glass snake is a limbless lizard with a long fragile tail.

Fourth: The name puff adder is often applied to the spreading adder. "Adder" is applied to various kinds of snakes; there is no "true adder." The real puff adder, however, is poisonous and is found only in Africa and Arabia.

Fifth: Coral snakes are natives to the United States.

Sixth: The fer-de-lance does not reach the United States.

Seventh: Black snakes *may* chase people who run from them, but it is scarcely a habit.

THE World's cruelest ship transported 167,000 men, women and children prisoners on the floating hell.

Request:— (1) What was the notorious convict ship *Success*, where was she built, type of ship was she?

(2) Could you give a short account of her history and notable events in connection with her?

—AUBREY KARAGIANES, H.M.C.S *Vancouver*, Esquimalt, B. C.

Reply:—By Lieut. H. E. Rieseberg. From 1790 to 1868 over 167,000 men, women and children were transported from Great Britain to Australia in the British Convict Ship *Success*. She was built in 1787 of solid Burmah teak at Moulmai, East India, as an armed East India merchantman. Purchased by the British Government in 1802, she was converted into a floating convict prison, and became the commodore ship of the Felon Fleet, being generally known as the "Ocean Hell."

She is the oldest ship in the world and the only convict ship left afloat of that dreadful fleet of hells which sailed the Seven Seas in 1790 and later. Today, she is unchanged after all these years, nothing being omitted but her human freight and their sufferings from the cruelties and barbarities practiced upon them.

Aboard her are now shown, in their original state, all the airless dungeons and condemned cells, the whipping posts, the manacle irons, the branding-irons, the punishment balls, the leaden-tipped cat-o'nine-tails, the coffin-bath, and other fiendish inventions of man's brutality at the time. From keel to mast she cried aloud the greatest lesson the world has ever known in the history of human progress. Today she is still on her tour from port to port throughout the world, as an exhibition ship.

One-eighth of the world's gold lies on the bottom of the oceans. Our expert, Lieut. H. E. Rieseberg can tell you where, how deep, and how much. Lieut. Rieseberg has agreed to manage a new and unique department for Ask Adventure, *Sunken Treasure.*

We welcome Major Falk Harmel to our staff. He replaces Lieut. J. F. Starks as expert on aviation. And we thank Lieut. Starks for his fine service and wish him luck in the many activities which call him from our staff.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do Not send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. No Reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial banking or for employment.

Fishing.—JOHN B. THOMPSON (OZARK RIPLEY) care *Adventure.*

Small Boating.—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Canoeing.—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 117 W. Harrison St. Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating.—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping.—MAJ. CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., American Tourist Camp Ass'n, 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Yachting.—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

Motor Vehicles; Automotive and Aircraft Engines.—EDMOND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers.—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 69, Salem, Ore.

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First Aid, Hiking, Health-Building.—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, N. J.

Camping and Woodcraft.—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Mining and Prospecting.—*North America.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-Precious Stones.—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Calif.

Forestry in U. S. Big game hunting.—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry.—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Box 575 Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

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All Army Matters.—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

All Navy Matters.—LT. CMDR. VERNON C. BIXBY, U. S. N. (retired), P. O. Box 588, Orlando, Fla.

U. S. Marine Corps.—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, R. F. D. 1, Box 614, La Canada, Calif.

Aviation.—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., N. W. Washington, D. C.

State Police, Federal Secret Service, etc.—FRANCIS H. BENT, Box 174, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police.—PATRICK LEE, 189-16 Thirty-Seventh Ave., Flushing, N. Y.

Horses.—MAJ. THOMAS H. DAMERON, 1709 Berkley Ave., Peblo, Colo.

Dogs.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

North and Central American Anthropology.—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Taxidermy.—SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *Insects, poisonous, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *Reptiles and Amphibians.*—KARL P. SCHMIDT, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ornithology *Birds; Habits, distribution.*—DAVIS QUINN, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

Stamps.—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals.—HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society. Broadway, at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Radio.—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Rd., Roselle Pk., N. J.

Photography.—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 995 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

Football.—JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose St., N. Y. C.

Baseball.—FREDERICK LIEB, 250 Bronxville Rd., Bronxville, N. Y.

Track.—JACKSON SCHOLTZ, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Swimming and Lifesaving.—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skiing and Snowshoeing.—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Canada.

Archery.—EARL B. POWELL, care *Adventure.*

Wrestling.—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, School of Education New York University, Washington Sq., N. Y. C.

Boxing and Fencing.—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

The Sea Part 1 *British and American Waters.* Ships, seamen, statistics, record, oceans, waterways, seas, islands. *Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea,* Islands and Coasts.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va. **2** *Old Time Sailoring, Ship Modelling and Marine Architecture.*—CHARLES H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Sunken Treasure.—Data of salvagable sunken treasure ships from 1522 to the present.—LIEUT. HARRY E. RIESENBERG, 47 Dick St., Rosemont, Alexandria, Va.

The Tropics.—SEYMOUR GATES POND, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands.—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

★New Guinea.—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★New Zealand; Cook Island, Samoa.—TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star,* Fielding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania.—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands.—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States, and Yunnan.*—Temporarily vacant. **2** *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, India Kashmir, Nepal.*—Temporarily vacant. **3** *Annam, Loas, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China, Southern and Eastern China.*—Temporarily vacant. **4** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3, Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **5** *Japan.*—OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntingdon Ave., Scarsdale, N. Y. **6** *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 ★*Egypt, Tunis, Algeria.*—Temporarily vacant. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Semaliland, British Samali Coast Protectorate, Eriprea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDAN MAC CREAGH, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y. **3** *French Somaliland, Belgium Congo, British Sudan.*—Temporarily vacant. **4** *Tripoli, Sahara, caravans.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, *care Adventure.* **5** *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.* **6** *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, Firestone Plantations Co., Akron, Ohio. **7** *Cape Colonoy, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, and Rhodesia.*—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Simi, Calif. **8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada.

Madagascar.—RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe.—G. I. COLBURN, East Ave., New Canaan, Con.

South America Part 1 *Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.* **2** *Venezuela, The Guineas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brasil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 414 W. 121st St., N. Y. C.

West Indies.—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Neuva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Central America.—E. BRUGUIERE, care *Adventure.*

Mexico Part 1 *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITETAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, TEX. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md. **3** *South of line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—JOHN NEWMAN PAGE, Sureno Carranza 16, Cuautla, Morelos, Mexico.

★Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Box 1331, St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland *Dog-teams, whaling, Eskimos, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island (Fur Farming).*—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, N. Y. **2** †*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. **3** †*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungova and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care *Adventure.* **4** †*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate,* Trenton, Ont., Canada. **5** †*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 269 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. **6** *Humers Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Dept. of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. **7** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **8** *Northw. Ter. and Arctic, Ellesmere Land and half-explored islands west, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland.*—PATRICK LEE, 189-16, Thirty-Seventh Ave., Flushing, N. Y. **9** ★*Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie, Northern Keewatin, Hudson Bay Mineral Belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, Flin Flon, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska and Mountain Climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 922 Centinela Blvd., Inglewood, Calif.

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★(*Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
†(*Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

***The next issue of* Adventure**

"DAMN TOFF JEEGER!"

SIX STICKS of dynamite lift the adobe jail off Steve Kane. He and his partner Omaha Oglesby ride back across the border to the old L4L ranch—to find their boss Barney Macrea dead with a bullet above his heart.

"Done shot himself when they found he robbed the gold express," said the sheriff.

"And I'm going to buy the ranch from his daughter at my own rates," said Joe East of the neighboring Quarter Circle JHE.

"You're both wrong," said Steve Dane, and set out to prove them so—with fists and bullets and with his wily cowboy brain.

"He's the nicest man I know," said Mary Macrea.

"I don't know about heem being nice," responded the Mexican cook, "but he is damn toff jeeger which is worth twenty nice man."

In the days and nights of hard riding, straight shooting, quick thinking and reckless courage that followed, Steve's enemies found plenty of grim reason to agree with the cook. And so will you when you meet Steve in BORDER MAN, the complete novel by W. C. TUTTLE in the September 15th issue.

Remember that

Adventure

now appears twice a month—the September 15th issue goes on sale September 1st

ALSO a novelette NIGHT PATROL by Theodore Fredenburgh, author of the stirring GUNS UP!—the second part of Ared White's great spy story SECRET AGENT B-7—a story by Paul Annixter of titanic battle in the sea between the world's largest living creatures—and other stories and features.

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Here is the very course you need if you want to get a good paying position as a Show Card Letterer or Sign Letterer.

H. L. Wood, a clerk, made more than $700 "on the side" before he had completed his I. C. S. course and also won $125 in prizes. William Whitman, a former wagon builder, now has a sign painting business of his own and is earning *nearly three times* as much as he did before enrolling with the International Correspondence Schools. Use coupon for free booklet.

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